A Recoiling Vengeance

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A

RECOILING VENGEANCE

"Revenge at first, though sweet,
Bitter ere long, back on itself recoils."
MILTON

BY

FRANK BARRETT

AUTHOR OF "HIS HELPMATE," "JOHN FORD,"
"THE GREAT HESPER," ETC.

IN TWO VOLS

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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I. PAGE

HOW IT ALL BEGAN 1

CHAPTER II.

NURSE GERTRUDE 13

CHAPTER III.

MR. LYNN YEAMES MAKES HIS APPEARANCE 26

CHAPTER IV.

AN UNLUCKY BEGGAR 42

CHAPTER V.

DIAMOND CUTS DIAMOND 50

CHAPTER VI.

TWO PHASES OF A GOOD GIRL'S CHARACTER 58

CHAPTER VII.

LYNN FALLS INTO A TRAP 74

CHAPTER VIII.

I FALL OUT OF A TRAP 89

CHAPTER IX. PAGE
A PELLET OF PAPER 98

CHAPTER X.
A MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE 102

CHAPTER XI.
THE MORTIFICATION OF MRS. YEAMES 115

CHAPTER XII.
THE DINGLE COTTAGE 126

CHAPTER XIII.
AWDREY PERSEVERES 140

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

PAGE

"A NICE FUSS THEY MADE ABOUT IT" 5

"NURSE GERTRUDE CAME DOWN TO DINNER WITHOUT THE BECOMING LITTLE CAP" 20

"WE LEFT MRS. YEAMES AT HER COTTAGE" 38

"THERE IS A MAN WORTH TALKING ABOUT" 63

"GRINDING AWAY WITH A PESTLE AND MORTAR AND A BOOK BEFORE HIM" 70

"SOMEHOW OR OTHER HE PROPOSED TO HER THAT NIGHT" 76

"THAT WILL SHALL BE CONTESTED" 124

"MISS DALRYMPLE POINTED OUT WHERE THERE SURELY WOULD BE PRIMROSES IN THE SPRING" 135

"'I WANT TO SEE MR. FLEXMORE'S WILL'" 141

A RECOILING VENGEANCE.

CHAPTER I.

HOW IT ALL BEGAN.

My name is Keene, Anthony Keene. I am a lawyer; sixty-four is my age. You may see what kind of man I am by my portrait; not over pleasant with any one.

George Flexmore and I were friends. He was my first client when I set up in Coneyford, a small town just large enough at that time, as I believed, to keep a lawyer of its own; there are a couple of us now, and

we have as much to do as we need. Flexmore had just then come into a fortune of £30,000, and he did not know what to do with it. I prevented him from losing it, as he certainly would have done without proper direction, for he was an easy-going man, of a credulous disposition, such as your needy adventurer and shifty speculator love to take in hand. For every man that has money there are ninety-nine who are anxious to spend it for him.

"If any one asks you for money, Flexmore," said I, "don't refuse him: send him to me." And he did so, with this result—he never lost a penny by these good-natured friends.

He had a great respect for me—more than I deserved doubtless. He seemed to think that whatever I did must be right, and I believe it was the sheer force of example that kept him out of matrimony so long. Because I did not care to take a wife, he thought best to keep single. But the conditions were different. I am not an easy-going man, and marriage would have been purgatory for me or my wife, and the result must have been equally bad for both of us in either case. Besides, a lawyer has so much to occupy his thoughts in the interest of his

clients that he has not an hour in the day to devote to anything else. But Flexmore had nothing to do from morning to night that he might not very well set aside to attend to the wants of somebody else; and as to worries—he hadn't enough to keep him from getting fat.

Now, a man ought to have solicitude for something beyond himself, if it's only to give reasonable activity to his faculties; and Flexmore felt this also. He saw that he ought to have some other object in life than to eat and sleep and kill time—that his life was incomplete, in fact. But he still made pretence of being content with a bachelor's existence.

One day I caught him singing his old song, *When a man's single he lives at his ease*, but in such a lugubrious strain that it would have made me laugh if it had not irritated me.

"That's humbug, Flexmore," said I, "and you know it."

"What," said he, "does not a single man live at his ease?"

"Not when he has only himself to think of. A man's happiness consists in making other people

happy—unless he's a lawyer. You're not a lawyer, and you ought to be making some one else happy. You'd be more at your ease if you had some one else to think about, and somebody else to think about you."

"Do you mean that I ought to marry, Tony?" he asked, blushing like a girl.

"That is exactly what I do mean, George."

"But I'm fifty. I'm too old to think about marriage now."

"A man's too old to think about marriage when nobody will marry him, not before. There's little Miss Vaughan, who has been waiting to be asked these three years; there are dozens of girls to be chosen from if——"

"Do you think she would have me—that Miss Vaughan?" he interrupted eagerly.

"Well, the best way of deciding that point is to go and ask her this afternoon," said I.

The result of this advice was that Flexmore married Miss Vaughan just six weeks after.

She was much younger than he, as a wife should be. A happier couple I never saw. He lived to

please her, and she to please him—that was the chief object of their lives.

A year after their marriage they had a child, and

"A NICE FUSS THEY MADE ABOUT IT."

a nice fuss they made about it. I can't abide babies, though they never could believe this, and were continually plaguing me "to kiss the little dear." The

child did not seem to like it, and I know I hated it; but a lawyer, to please his clients, has to put up with a good many disagreeable duties. However, this mutual repugnance faded away, and we came to like each other in the course of time.

She grew up a pleasant little child, shy and timid, with a clinging affection for lovable persons and things. I never saw anything like the passionate attachment that existed between her and her sweet-tempered mother. It inspired me with a melancholy foreboding, for this strenuous love, I have noticed, too often springs from an inner consciousness (presentiment, if you will) of coming separation.

Poor Mrs. Flexmore had never been a robust person, and—well, to cut short a story that is too painful to dwell upon, she died when little Laure was eleven years old.

Flexmore was then sixty-two, but he was not too old to suffer. The loss unmanned him completely. He took on like a woman and he would have been less a man if he had not, perhaps.

"My poor old friend," said I, "it would have been better to let you live on a bachelor."

"No, no," he replied. "After such happiness an eternity of suffering would find me still a gainer."

"You have your child—your little Laure," said I, and then to turn his thoughts from the past, I talked about the future, and what he should do for the child's welfare.

Indeed the child's grief gave me almost as much concern as the father's. It was not a passionate outburst, that spends itself like a summer shower and gives place to peace and smiles, but a continued, fruitless yearning for that loved one to come back who was gone for ever.

"You must have a woman here to comfort her," I said to Flexmore. "You're no good."

He agreed to this, and sent for his deceased brother's widow, as being his nearest female relative, and she came readily enough, a woman of fifty, hard as nails, and stringy as an old crow.

Of course she never had "approved" (that was her word) of her brother's marriage, so she had little sympathy with his loss and no patience with his grief. She looked upon little Laure's distress as unnatural in a child (unusual it certainly was), and her morbid condition as the result of defective education; and

she set about correcting all this by forcing the little thing to read some instructive and moral books which no conceivable creature could find interest or pleasure in.

Laure had no appetite even when the kind old cook had a free hand and tempted her with pleasant dishes. When the cook's hand was no longer free—about half-an-hour after Mrs. Yeames had taken her things off—the child ate nothing.

"But you must eat; you cannot gain strength if you do not," said Mrs. Yeames severely. "It's very wrong for little girls to reject good food," and when Laure turned away to cry she was told that she must not cry, that she couldn't expect to be happy if she gave way like that, and that all good little girls did as they were bid, and didn't cry when they were told to look pleasant and nice.

After she had been there three days Dr. Awdrey had to be sent for. Laure was feverish and couldn't "hold herself up properly." Dr. Awdrey ordered her to be put to bed at once, gave directions respecting treatment, and sent physic to be administered every two hours.

Mrs. Yeames had studied medicine from a shilling

handbook that she carried with her as if it were an amulet; she diluted the physic and administered doses when she thought fit.

Little Laure was very much worse when the doctor called the next day: and it was not long before he discovered the reason.

He came down into the library, where I was sitting with Flexmore.

"Your child is in a very dangerous condition," he said firmly.

"Heaven have mercy upon me!" exclaimed my old friend, clasping his hands. "What is to be done?"

"She must have a proper nurse, to begin with," said Dr. Awdrey.

"A proper nurse? there is my sister-in-law."

"Dr. Awdrey said 'a proper nurse,'" said I, for I hated Mrs. Yeames already.

"Do you know of one, doctor?" asked Flexmore.

"Yes; I can get you a professional nurse—one whom I can rely on implicitly, and who can do more than all my physic for the poor child. She is in the Hospital for Little Children at London, and I believe she would come at once if I asked her."

"Then, for mercy's sake, telegraph to her at once."

When the doctor was gone, Flexmore, in some embarrassment, turned to me.

"It will not work, Tony," said he despondently. "The nurse will never be able to put up with that old—old——"

"Cat," said I, supplying the word he had not the courage to articulate. "Go on."

"Every one of the servants has given notice already. They can't stand her."

"Can you stand her?" I asked.

He looked at me as if hesitating before the heresy of disbelieving in the virtues of a woman whose every action bespoke conscious rectitude, and then summoning up his fortitude he said—"I am afraid I cannot long."

"Of course you can't," said I; "she's turned the whole place topsy-turvy in putting things in order, and left not a bit of comfort anywhere."

"Yes, yes; all the things that my darling loved she has packed away—the little trifles with which she made these rooms so bright and pleasant. I can't bear to see the place altered; and those trifles, Tony, I miss them—I miss them."

"We'll have 'em all back again in twenty-four hours."

"But how are we to get rid of her and all her boxes and her library and things? I believe she has ordered a lot of furniture to be sent on."

"Yes; and I warrant she's settled what she'll wear when she leads you to the altar."

"Never, Tony—I'll never marry again. What! do you think she meditates such a thing?"

"She isn't a widow if she doesn't."

"Good gracious, what have I done? I asked her to come and live here. How can I get rid of her?"

"Don't bother yourself about that, George. You leave her to me. Give me full authority to act in your behalf and stick to my directions."

He gave me his word most impressively that he would.

"And will you have it out with her before long?" he asked anxiously.

"Now, directly," said I, rising. "This is just the sort of job I like."

And I went into the sitting-room and sent at once for Mrs. Yeames. Then we had it out. She was a

tough one to deal with, but not nearly so tough as I am. I tried to be polite, but I fear I insulted her. She certainly said I did, and went into the library to know if her brother-in-law would tolerate such a want of respect on the part of a *mere attorney;* and the question being put directly to Flexmore, whether she or I were to leave that house at once and for ever, he replied that he felt convinced, taking all things into consideration, that he could better afford to lose her than me.

After that there was nothing for the indignant widow to do but to pack up and pack off—which she did, happily, before her fury gave place to more prudential considerations.

CHAPTER II.

NURSE GERTRUDE.

I DROPPED in on old Flexmore the next day to see if I might be wanted (for it appeared to me not unlikely that Mrs. Yeames might return when she got the better of her vile temper), and found my old friend busy restoring to their wonted places the pictures and *bric-à-brac* so dear to him as evidence of his poor wife's taste and fancy.

"It's all right, then?" said I.

"Yes; the place begins to look itself again. Every little thing, you know, Tony, she bought with the

thought that it might please me and make our home sweeter." "She" was the good little wife he had lost.

"Yes; she had good taste and a good heart," said I. "And the old woman—have you heard anything of her?"

"She wrote saying that, in the interest of her dear niece Laure, she would be happy to see me and, if possible, arrange some *modus vivendi*. I thought I would see you before replying."

"Quite right. Give me her letter; I'll answer it for you. I can say you have put the matter in my hands—see? I'll undertake to say she won't come back."

He thanked me with tearful gratitude, and asked me to stay to lunch.

There was such a savoury smell of cooking in the house as I had not inhaled since the coming of Mrs. Yeames, and I accepted without hesitation—the more readily as I wished to see Nurse Gertrude, who, Flexmore told me, had arrived that morning and would in all probability take lunch with us.

I expected to see a comely, motherly, middle-aged woman, and was taken altogether by surprise when

Nurse Gertrude presented herself in the person of a slight young woman of twenty-two or thereabouts.

Of course I am no judge of female beauty, but I don't think Nurse Gertrude at that time could be considered handsome, or even very pretty. If I have any predilection, it is for large women with round, full figures: and I think I rather like a saucy eye and a nice little turned-up nose.

Now Nurse Gertrude, though by no means short, was, as I have said, slight and thin. She had a very delicate fair complexion and pretty dark hair, to be sure; but her nose was long and her eyes were by no means saucy, but calm and deep and thoughtful. Her expression was cheerful, and she had a pretty trick of blushing, but in repose her face was full of intelligence and solicitude. Her teeth were not regular, but there was the sweetest play in her lips, that harmonized with her voice and gentle laugh. One could not look at her without being impressed with the belief that she was essentially a pure and honest girl, with a very earnest purpose, an amiable disposition, and a clear-seeing, right-feeling mind. Her eyes—they were dark gray—were so true and frank and loyal that one was attracted towards her

as to a friend whose fidelity and love could never be doubted.

Let me stop while I can, if I say more I shall finish by declaring that she was downright beautiful —an assertion which, though I would not contradict it now, I was far from venturing then.

One thing however did strike me: and this was that in some peculiarity—I know not what—she bore a resemblance to Mrs. Flexmore as I had known her in her younger days. And this seemed also to have struck Flexmore, for more than once I saw him, forgetful of the table, looking at her with the tenderest interest on his poor old woe-begone face.

"Oh, I see how this will end," said I to myself. "He'll marry that girl if she'll have him."

And that was the opinion of a good many other people before long.

Mrs. Yeames, like an old buzzard that has missed its prey, hovered about the neighbourhood, watching the quarry with the jealous intention of preventing any other creature of her own species clawing up what she had failed to secure. She had heard that Flexmore was worth thirty thousand pounds! A nice picking for somebody, and poor old

Flexmore was no longer a hale and hearty man.

She took a cottage at the other end of the town, and joined a clique of charitable ladies, who could make a shirt for the heathen or pick to pieces the reputation of a fellow-Christian with equal ability.

It is pretty certain they did not leave the character of Nurse Gertrude alone.

Meanwhile Nurse Gertrude fulfilled her duties with the calm self-possession of one conscientiously doing what she feels to be right; and I believe that, if the question ever entered her consideration, she did not care two straws what I or any one else thought about her. What she had come there to do, she did—and as if by magic. With Dr. Awdrey's help she got the fever under in a week, and after that she brought a smile back to the poor child's wasted face, which was of still greater importance; for when one can smile, one can eat and enjoy food. She gave little Laure something to love, and nourished her heart with kindness. That was what she needed: that was what she got. She had been craving for love since her mother was taken away

and must have died without it, as surely as a plant must die without sunlight.

But how was she to be weaned of this love-food, in order that Nurse Gertrude might in time return to her hospital? Every day her appetite grew by what it fed on. All the clinging affection she had borne to her mother she now exhibited towards Nurse Gertrude. The child had recognized the likeness that had struck me: mother and nurse, unlike in some respects, were still of the same type of woman—and an excellent type too. After a time it became obvious that Laure was not to be weaned, and that to take away Nurse Gertrude would inflict the same terrible suffering the child had endured in losing her mother. Thereupon there were consultations between Flexmore, Dr. Awdrey, and me.

"It is obvious that Nurse Gertrude is very strongly attached to your child," said Dr. Awdrey.

"She is not unhappy here; she looks better than when she came," said Flexmore.

"Oh, undoubtedly she is better," Dr. Awdrey agreed; "the confinement of the hospital and the air of London were telling upon her—in fact, I must admit that in recommending her I was influenced

by the consideration that the change would be to her advantage as well as your daughter's."

"If she would only consent to stay here as a companion to dear Laure—in any capacity, on any terms!" said Flexmore. "Do you think she would?"

"Go and ask her," said I.

She was asked; but Dr. Awdrey was the negotiator, for Flexmore had not the courage of a mouse. And Nurse Gertrude acquiesced, setting aside all other considerations for the sake of the child whose love had won her heart. So Dr. Awdrey put it; for my own part, I could not see what sacrifice she had made in exchanging a close hospital ward for a pleasant and airy house, and an ill-paid slavery for a very remunerative position where she was free to do just as she liked. (Dr. Awdrey, in whose hands the whole affair was placed, had stuck Flexmore for a thumping big salary.) No; I looked upon it that this young lady, together with other very good qualities, had a very clear perception of her duty to herself, and that she foresaw as plainly as I did that sooner or later she would become Mrs. Flexmore.

However to stick to the facts of the case: that day Nurse Gertrude came down to dinner without

the becoming little cap which had previously distinguished her as an official nurse; and if we had

"NURSE GERTRUDE CAME DOWN TO DINNER WITHOUT THE BECOMING LITTLE CAP."

come to think her pretty in her cap, we were bound to admit that she looked still nicer without it—her

pretty hair drawn neatly up and coiled plainly on her head.

Gracious powers! how the women folk in our little town cackled when the news spread that this person was henceforth to be a sort of housekeeper and companion in Mr. Flexmore's house, and that the servants were no longer to call her Nurse Gertrude, but Miss Dalrymple, if you please. Though why they should be astonished was a mystery, considering that according to their own statement they had foreseen this, and "said so all along." Who was this Miss Dalrymple? Nobody knew. Why had she gone into a hospital as nurse? Ah! a good many young women go into hospitals as a sort of refuge, they generally have a history—something to conceal, and, too often, something to expiate by what they consider work of charity, though, as for that, they are paid quite as well as ordinary servants, so there's not much sacrifice on their part. It is well known that many go in with the hope of entrapping some young doctor or medical student, while others, like this Miss Dalrymple, contrive to work their way into well-to-do families and play on the sense of gratitude or fancy of some old imbecile, such as poor dear Mr

Flexmore. These were the views of those miserable women who refer to the members of their little coterie as "very superiah ladies—very superiah!" They questioned Dr. Awdrey about Miss Dalrymple—about her history, her antecedents, her family, &c.

"All I know about Miss Dalrymple," he said, in reply, "is that she has the finest and sweetest character I have ever studied."

Poor Doctor Awdrey! we thought, she has thrown her spell over him at some time; he might have married her if he had only had the sense to let her stop in the hospital; but there was little chance for him now, with old Mr. Flexmore absolutely in her power. With a weak man of that kind, she could easily obtain an offer of marriage, and at any time she could reckon upon Laure's tears supporting her claim for a more definite and satisfactory position.

She was incontrovertibly spoiling that child, Mrs. Yeames declared, quite spoiling her with indulgence; dressing her like a little popinjay, though she was still in mourning; whoever heard of a child of that age being allowed to run wild and do whatever she would, spoiling her things and behaving like a tomboy

more than anything else. A nice self-willed, perverse, detestable girl she would grow up under such treatment; but there, of course Nurse Gertrude (they wouldn't call her Miss Dalrymple) had only one object, and that was to make herself indispensable, in the opinion of poor dear, dear George! Ah, dear George was much to be pitied.

The worst of it was that "dear George" bore his affliction very patiently, and seemed to like it.

Miss Dalrymple's position was not altogether an enviable one. She must have known of the ill-feeling against her, must have divined the cruel things that were said about her, though she showed no sign of being hurt under the snubs administered freely to her by visitors, who called ostensibly to see how dear little Laure was progressing. With her calm, deliberative disposition she may have foreseen all the consequences of taking the position in Flexmore's house which she now held. She did nothing to controvert the opinion people chose to entertain regarding her; nothing to make them know that she was better than they chose to think. It was only by accident that the truth came out.

We have a flower show in our town once a year.

The first day is the best of course, and, the prices excluding the poorer kind of people, only the upper sort are there. There was a rumour that titled visitors were staying with the Caselys, and that probably they would visit the show in the afternoon; wherefore you may be sure that Mrs. Yeames and her "superiah" set were all there in full feather.

About three o'clock I saw Miss Dalrymple come in with Laure; she never missed any occasion of giving pleasure to the child, or of taking it herself, for that matter. She was plainly dressed; but, to my mind, there was no more elegant young lady there. Mrs. Yeames with three of her finest friends stopped them, and with the most distant patronizing inclination of their heads to Miss Dalrymple bent down to kiss Laure and ask after her poor dear papa. Then Mrs. Yeames, taking the child's hand, led her to a bank of cut flowers, asking her whether she could spell the labels attached, and whether she knew what was a *papaver somniferum.*

In the midst of this instructive display of her own acquirements, there was a flutter amongst the visitors, and word was whispered that Mrs. Casely had arrived and had brought Lord Dunover with her. And there,

sure enough, was Mrs. Casely with a tall, white haired, aristocratic old gentleman, coming right down upon the little party. There was not time to get away from little Laure and that horrid Nurse Gertrude, when Mrs. Casely met them and introduced his lordship. Dunover bowed stiffly, but suddenly catching sight of Miss Dalrymple his face became illumined with a smile of heartfelt pleasure, and exclaiming, "What, Gertie, my dear, you here!" he took her by both hands and kissed her pretty lips. Then turning to Mrs. Casely he said—

"Mrs. Casely, let me introduce you to my niece—a little democrat who almost shakes my class prejudice, for she prefers independence as a hospital nurse to sharing the fallen fortunes of her family."

Then it was known that Miss Dalrymple was actually the niece of an earl. And she and Laure spent a week at Casely Manor, where Mrs. Yeames and her "superiah" set had never been allowed to stay longer than half an hour.

CHAPTER III.

MR. LYNN YEAMES MAKES HIS APPEARANCE.

FTER this I said to Flexmore—

"Why on earth don't you marry Miss Dalrymple?"

"Do you think she would have me?" he asked, with a composure that showed that the idea was not unconsidered.

"You can but ask her," I replied. "There's nothing like asking when one is in doubt."

"I believe you think that any woman is to be had

for the asking. But if I were sure of being accepted, I would not make the offer."

"Why?"

"Because she is worthy of a better man than I am for one thing."

"That she can best decide. What's your next reason?"

"That I have no wish to marry."

"That isn't much of a reason. You have to think of what is best for your daughter and Miss Dalrymple. Your little one ought to have a mother—some one from whom she will be inseparable when you are gone: and there's not a soul in the world better fitted to take the place of a mother than that girl."

"I know it—I know it," said Flexmore; "I have thought of that."

"And then Miss Dalrymple ought to have the opportunity offered her of making her position here less anomalous than it is."

"I have a better plan for her welfare than that, Tony," he said quietly.

"Then let me know it, George; for we must do something to stop the mouths of these cackling scandal-mongers and tittle-tattling widows and spinsters," said I.

"She must marry Awdrey: that is the husband for that sweet girl," said he.

"Dr. Awdrey!" I exclaimed in astonishment, for I had never thought of him as a marrying man.

"Yes. He loves her—I know he does. Who could see her and know her, and not love her? And he is an excellent fellow. I wish he were a little lighter and better-looking; but I couldn't wish him to have a better heart, or a more lovable disposition. He's a fine man, Tony."

"Yes, he is a fine man," I assented readily, "morally."

"He's not ill-looking; a little serious perhaps."

"That's not astonishing. No one has so much reason to be serious as a fool."

"You do not mean to tell me that Dr. Awdrey is a fool," said my old friend indignantly.

"A fool in a worldly sense he is. In his profession, I grant, he may be as wise as you like. He can see into men's stomachs, but he can't see into their minds. If you can't see through the mask with which most men conceal their true nature, you are bound to be duped. Awdrey is so honest that he cannot believe in knavery; and a man with his confiding disposition

is the born prey for tricksters. He was cheated into buying a practice that was worth nothing, and he goes a round of thirty miles a day to doctor patients who never pay their fees. Hang me, I'd physic 'em if they tried to serve me in that fashion. However a woman loves her husband none the less for his being serious: and as for looks, in my opinion there's not a man in Coneyford to compare with him; he's six foot in his stockings, and every inch of him a man. That's good enough."

"Then you agree with me that he would be a suitable husband for Miss Dalrymple?"

"Yes, but he won't marry her, for all that. It's as much as ever he can keep his head above water now, and fool as he is—in worldly matters—he wouldn't tie a millstone round his neck."

"Miss Dalrymple is not a millstone," said poor old Flexmore warmly.

"I know that. She's a good woman, and would work herself ill to help her husband, or worry herself ill if she couldn't. That is what Awdrey would not have his wife do, and the only way to prevent it is to keep single. And single he'll keep."

"No, Keene, no; he must marry Gertrude. I have

thought it all out. My little Laure must have a father as well as a mother when I am gone—and I don't think that is long hence, Tony. I shall not see sixty-four."

I tried to combat this notion, though I myself was far from regarding it as improbable; and then to turn the conversation, I said—

"Well, to go back to what you have been thinking out—what's your idea?"

"I wish to put Awdrey in a position to marry Miss Dalrymple. I know he is poor, but I am rich."

"You'll never get Awdrey to take an independence from you."

"Not while I live—but in time to come when I am gone? This is my idea, Tony. I would leave him every penny I have on the condition that he adopts Laure as his daughter."

"I see your notion. There will then be a second inducement for him to make Miss Dalrymple his wife in the fact that the child is inseparable from her."

"That's it, Tony. Now tell me. What is your opinion on the subject?"

"Well, I think the idea is a capital good one, so good that I wish I had thought of it myself. I might if there had not been a little too much romance in it for my mind to take readily to. Still, it *is* a good idea."

"Very well, then; draw up a will in accordance with it. Settle everything upon Awdrey, subject to deduction for a few smaller legacies that I will write in."

"I'll sleep on it. We won't hurry. You're good for some time to come."

"Let me have the draft of it in a week at the outside, Tony," he said eagerly.

I promised to do this, and went home, turning the matter over in my mind. I considered from time to time during the week, and finding no material objection to the scheme I put Flexmore's notion into legal form with certain modifications, and then took a rough draft for his inspection.

"Is your master at home?" I asked the girl who opened the door.

"Yes, sir; he's in the library with Mrs. Yeames and Mr. Yeames."

"Mr. Yeames? what Mr. Yeames?" I asked the little maid sharply.

"Mr. Lynn Yeames is his name, I think, sir; a young gentleman."

"Mrs. Yeames's son. I know him," said I; and then I stood, rubbing my feet on the mat and wondering what on earth he had come upon the scene for. No good, I felt sure.

Mr. Lynn Yeames was the son of Mrs. Yeames by her second marriage. That was not much in his favour, but the rest was still less to his advantage. I had been twice employed by Flexmore on his account: once, to settle some college debts which Mrs. Yeames declared she could not meet, though she could scrape enough together to send him to a university for the gratification of her wretched vanity, when he ought to have been earning his bread, like other lads of his condition; and a second time to stay an action for breach of promise, threatened by a townsman's daughter with whom he had got entangled. Fellows brought up by foolish women on bad principles are always either getting out of scrapes or getting into them, and I asked myself which purpose had procured his uncle the doubtful pleasure of this visit.

I shook myself together, and went into the library with my wits on the alert.

Lynn Yeames at this time was about four-and-twenty, and his looks would have deceived any one but a lawyer. A sturdy young fellow of average height, but very thick-set, he was dressed in a gray Norfolk jacket and knickerbockers, with a pair of legs that would have done credit to a drayman, and seemed to be the object of his mother's constant admiration. His skin was very fair, his eyes very blue, his lips very red; his hair was combed down on one side of his forehead, and he had a small carroty moustache. His manner was effusive, and he affected a rollicking dare-devil air, which went well enough with his full-blooded complexion, and other signs of animal strength, but were not altogether in keeping with a certain slyness in the turn of his eyes and the lowering of their lids. But then this slyness was in harmony with his profession of being up to all the ways of the world and knowing his way about. Most people, I believe, would have been favourably impressed with him, and have liked him the better for failings which might be attributed to youth and exuberant vigour; but I did not like him.

He had come down, it seemed, to spend a few days with the "mater" (I hate young people who can't

call their dearest friend by the sweetest word in the language, "mother"), and he had only been here a day and was awfully bored already—not a decent billiard board in the place, hags at the bars, and not a light to be seen after ten-thirty. He wanted to know if there was any fishing or shooting, or any mortal thing a man might do to earn a night's repose.

"There's the piano, Lynn, dear," suggested Mrs. Yeames, anxious to show off her son's accomplishments. "You know that you play very well." She said this in French—and bad French too.

To this he replied in a mixture of the two tongues, not loth to show off, that one did not come into the country to play Schubert, and that sort of thing."

"For goodness' sake, sir, let us confine our talk to English or French," said I. "Have you heard anything lately from Miss Kite?" This was the name of the injured young lady at Oxford.

"If you please, do not mention the name of that horrid, designing, worthless person," said Mrs. Yeames.

"She's worth four hundred pounds more than she was, madam," said I; "for that's what I had to pay to make her withdraw her action."

Mrs. Yeames flicked the dust off her silk gown and looked extremely uncomfortable.

"No new scrape, I hope, Mr. Lynn?" I continued.

"Not exactly. What the deuce should make you suppose there was?" he asked sheepishly, for it takes very little to upset the equanimity of these boisterous young gentlemen.

"What made me suppose it?" I echoed. "Why, seeing you here!"

"I want to find some shooting. That's all I came for."

"I can let you have it, if you are prepared to pay. I have a client who will let you the shooting over two thousand acres."

"That's my sort. Of course I'll pay. When can I begin to blaze away?"

"As soon as you have settled with me. Come to my office and we will arrange it at once."

I wanted to get him away from there, for already I scented the purpose with which he had been brought; and I was anxious to let him the shooting, which was twenty miles off.

"Oh! you cannot go yet, dear," interposed Mrs. Yeames; "you have not seen Laure. How is that little darling, George, dear?"

"Very well, thank you. She has gone for a walk with Miss Dalrymple."

"Miss Dalrymple? Who is she? a governess?" asked Lynn.

"Something more than that," replied Mrs. Yeames, "quite a friend of the family—a most estimable young lady. She was a professional nurse, but—what do you think?—it turns out she is the niece of the Earl of Dunover!"

This change in Mrs. Yeames's regard towards Gertrude was not surprising, considering what a sycophant the widow was; but nothing could make me believe that in the past twenty-four hours she had said not a word about her to Lynn.

"Gad! I should like to see the young lady—if she *is* young," said Lynn.

"Oh, she is I assure you, and excessively charming and pretty," said Mrs. Yeames; "quite superiah! You really must see her."

While this chatter was going on, I drew the draft of Flexmore's will from my pocket, and, as if endorsing it, I wrote in pencil—

"They want you to invite them to lunch. Don't."

This I handed to Flexmore.

"Here is a draft of the agreement you asked me for," said I.

He looked at the words I had written, and thanked me. Then he said he hoped his nephew would call in and say good-bye before he left.

After that the visitors were bound to rise and say "Good-bye for the present."

"We'll go to the office and settle about that shooting," said I, rising at the same time.

We left Mrs. Yeames at her cottage, and went on to my place of business. Nothing was said about my old friend Flexmore until we had settled about the shooting, when Lynn said, as he took up his stick and deerstalker—

"Poor old nuncky looks precious shaky."

"He's much better than he was a month ago," I replied.

"Shouldn't think he'd last long, though; should you? He's sixty-two, you know."

"His life's worth ten years' purchase," said I emphatically.

"Is it, though?" Then, after a pause—"I suppose he's pretty warm?"

"I would give fifty thousand pounds for his estate at this moment."

"Fifty thousand, eh?"

Another pause. Then in a careless tone—

"WE LEFT MRS. YEAMES AT HER COTTAGE."

"Who's this Miss Thingumbob the mater was talking about?"

"Miss Dalrymple. She is a particularly sensible young lady," I replied.

"That means that she knows how to look after Number One, I suppose?"

"If she did not know how to take care of herself, I shouldn't call her sensible."

"Wouldn't mind marrying the old man if she had the chance, eh?"

"I hope she would not, sincerely."

"Oh, you approve of his marrying Miss Dalrymple, do you?"

"Undoubtedly—for his own sake and the sake of his child. It's the very thing I have been persuading him to do."

That sly look came into the corner of his blue eye and I could fancy him saying to himself—

"Here's an old fool to let me into his client's secrets.

He was not sharp enough to see that my object was to put him on the wrong scent, and avert his suspicion from our actual wish and purpose.

"Well, if it is really to nuncky's interest to marry the girl, I hope he may get her," said he, giving me his hand; and we looked straight into each other's face before saying good-bye. I read in his eyes, "But he sha'n't marry her if I can help it." What he read in mine I cannot say.

Business took me to London, and kept me there hard at it for a fortnight. I had scarcely time to think of old Flexmore, but I went straight to him the moment I returned. I found a perceptible difference in his appearance: he looked a couple of years older.

"I am glad to see you, Tony," he said, holding my hand in his and giving it a trembling shake from time to time. "I am getting anxious about the will. I can't last long, I know; and I am very unsettled in my mind about many things."

"You shall sign the draft, and that will hold good in case of accident, while the copy is being drawn up in form. We'll settle that after dinner—for I mean to dine with you, George. There's game cooking I can smell it."

"Yes; we have had a good deal of game lately. Lynn brings something nearly every day."

"What! he came to stay a week, and is not gone yet?" I cried.

Flexmore shook his head.

"I don't think he means to go away either," he said.

I beat a tattoo on the table while I arranged my ideas on this subject.

"What does he come here for? Do you know, George?" I asked.

"To see Miss Dalrymple, I believe. He is paying her marked attention."

"I knew it!" I cried, slapping my leg. "I saw what he was after."

"Do you think he means to marry her? Is that what you saw?"

"No; but I saw he had made up his mind to prevent you marrying her!"

CHAPTER IV.

AN UNLUCKY BEGGAR.

What I had not foreseen was the means by which Lynn Yeames precluded an offer of marriage being made to Miss Dalrymple by his uncle. I had not thought of his making love to her himself; rather I anticipated his taking some underhand measures, in conjunction with his mother, to damage the young lady's character and prejudice Flexmore against her.

"You have not encouraged your nephew's visits, have you, George?" I asked.

"No; at the same time I could not refuse to receive him. There is nothing in his behaviour I could take exception to. Indeed he has tried his utmost to make himself agreeable."

"I don't doubt that for a moment, hang him! He can make himself pleasant if he likes, or unpleasant either. I warrant he's clever enough to keep his mother out of sight, eh?"

"She has not called since the day you met her here," Flexmore answered.

"And what effect has he made upon Miss Dalrymple with his agreeable ways?"

"I am afraid she likes him. It is only natural she should be brighter and gayer in his society. I am very dull, and there are no visitors here—none of her own age—and then Lynn is clever and lively; he plays nicely, and sings well too——"

"Oh, bother his singing! You don't mean to say he has charmed you with his songs?"

"No. I cannot like him. I fear he is not sincere. I may be prejudiced, but——"

"You're not. There's no love-making yet a while—Nothing like an engagement?"

"Oh, no! He is simply very attentive, and she could not be ungracious."

"We must stop it at that. There's no time to be lost," said I.

"Do you think he intends to marry her?"

"Not unless he's sure she has money. If your money were settled on her, he would. We will set his mind at rest on that subject."

"How?"

"You must sign your will, and give me permission to make its provisions known to Dr. Awdrey. I wager we will soon put Master Lynn's nose out of joint. With the prospect of making that girl his wife, dear old Awdrey will be another man. Lynn will sink into insignificance by the side of that fine fellow, despite his music and mongrel French."

I took care to be on the road about the time Awdrey was starting on his rounds, and when he came up in his gig I asked him to give me a lift as far as Langly.

He had to shift half-a-dozen books from the seat beside him to make place for me.

"What on earth are you carting your library about for?" I asked.

"They're only books of reference. Going along straight roads and up-hill I can give the old pony the reins and do a bit of work."

"You're burning the candle at both ends; it's bad enough to sit up half the night over your books."

"It is the only sort of pleasure a man in my position can afford."

"Then you should alter your position."

"It's too late to begin a new career. It will come all right one of these days, perhaps. People will have more confidence in me at sixty. At present I don't look as old as I feel."

"Families don't care for bachelor doctors, that's a fact. You ought to marry;"

"Marry!" exclaimed Awdrey, with a grim laugh, and then he looked ruefully into the distance.

"Yes, marry," I repeated. "There's Miss Dalrymple, you ought to marry her."

The colour mounted to his temple, but he said nothing in reply to my suggestion.

"You've known her some time, and you can't have known her without finding out that she has admirable

qualities, besides being as pretty a little lady as eyes could wish to rest on."

"That is true," he murmured, caressing the neck of the old pony with the end of his whip.

"Then why haven't you proposed to her?" I asked sharply.

"Because I'm an unlucky beggar," he replied bitterly—"an unlucky beggar."

"No, you're not."

"What, do you think she likes me?" he asked, with eager quickness—that being the sort of luck he I thought alluded to.

"There's no one who doesn't like you."

"Oh, in a general way," said he, in a tone of disappointment. "Well, supposing she had liked me well enough to risk the chance of poverty, do you think it would have been fair to take advantage of her courage, knowing what an unlucky beggar I am?"

"But you're not an unlucky beggar, I keep telling you."

"Perhaps you will show me where my luck lies, for I can't find it."

"I will show you," said I, "if I betray a client's

confidence to do it. Read that," and I put the draft of old Flexmore's will into his hand, open, that he might have no hesitation in glancing at it.

He just ran his eye down the draft, which could be read at a glance, for I pride myself on writing legibly and bold, and then exclaimed, turning to me in astonishment—

"Great Heavens! Why should Flexmore leave me all this money?"

"That you may be in a position to marry the girl you love, and that his child should have a good woman as well as a good man to protect and befriend her."

He dropped his hand, and I folded up the draft and slipped it back in my pocket. When I glanced at him again he was staring into the distance, and there was moisture on the lower lash of his eye.

"I *am* an unlucky beggar," he murmured again.

"You'll make me mad if you say that again, Awdrey," said I impatiently.

"Too late!" he faltered. "If I had only known this a week ago."

"Well, what difference would that have made? The draft was made out a fortnight ago."

"I did not know it. How could I guess such a thing?"

"You know it now, and that's better than guessing it a week ago."

He shook his head.

"Don't you know that Lynn Yeames is in love with her?" he asked.

"Lynn Yeames is a sneaking hound!" I said. "A cunning, double-faced——"

He interrupted me.

"You must not say anything to me against him. He is my friend."

"Your friend! How long has he been your friend?"

"A week to-morrow. He came to me, and in a frank and loyal manner told me that he had heard I was an old friend of Miss Dalrymple; he asked me if I were more than her friend—if I intended to make her my wife. I knew what that meant, and answered that I had no intention to marry her, and that she was free so far as I was concerned. 'In that case,' said he, 'I shall make her my wife.' And we shook hands on this understanding. With my hand in his, he asked if he might consider me his friend, and I answered heartily, yes!'"

"Confound Lynn Yeames!" I cried, unable to control my exasperation.

"You must admit that he acted openly and loyally," said Awdrey. "You are deceived in him."

"Yes," I replied, "for I did not think he was such a clever rascal as he is. Awdrey"—I added, after a minute's thought—"you must forget last week."

"Forget that I renounced all hope of making Gertrude my wife! Forget an understanding made with a man to whom I gave my hand as a friend! You don't know me, Mr. Keene."

"Oh, yes, I do," said I savagely. "Put me down here. I might as well try to soften the Lord Chief Justice with a sigh as convert you from your principles with reasoning, obstinate, stiff-backed old pillmonger! Here, give me your hand," I added, as I got to the ground, and I tried to hurt him with my grip.

"There, I've done with you; go on," said I; but as we parted, I added, speaking to myself, "But I've not done with Lynn Yeames yet, drat him!"

CHAPTER V.

DIAMOND CUTS DIAMOND.

When I got back to my office I set about drawing up Flexmore's will from the draft he had agreed to, and every word of it gave me pleasure, for I saw that it would bring everything right in the end.

"While Lynn Yeames is doubtful as to the disposition of his uncle's property," said I to myself, "he will refrain from committing himself to an

actual promise of marriage. His affair with Miss Kite will make him prudent in that respect; for he'll know very well that he won't get off for £400 a second time, if I can help it, and there'll be no uncle to pay the costs. And when he does know that his uncle has not left him a stiver, he'll drop Miss Dalrymple as a monkey drops a hot chestnut; then Awdrey will be freed from the Quixotic obligation he was lured into making, he will marry Nurse Gertrude, and all will end like a fairy story."

I was talking to myself in this strain as I proceeded to engross the will, when who should come into my office but the very person uppermost in my thoughts —Lynn Yeames.

"I have called to speak to you about that shooting, Mr. Keene," said he, offering his hand.

I put my quill in my mouth, and gave him my hand, then I said—

"One moment, Mr. Yeames—I will just finish this paragraph, and then we will go into your affair." The fact was I first wanted to settle in my mind how I should play with this young gentleman.

Would it do, I asked myself, to let him know how his uncle intended to dispose of his money? Would

that lead him to throw up at once a profitless game? I decided that it would not do; for he would then perhaps be urged to get his uncle by hook or by crook to revoke this will. By the time I had got to the next "whereas" I saw a better plan than that.

"Now, sir," said I, laying down my pen, turning my chair to face my visitor, and nursing my hands on my knee. "Now, sir, I am entirely at your service."

I assumed a suavity of manner I had not before employed with him, for I had to fight Mr. Lynn with his own weapon, viz.—hypocrisy.

"I should like to rent the shooting for another month, if I can," he said.

"There's no difficulty about that. Sir Bartlemy Vere is going to Scotland, and I shall be only too glad to let the shooting for him—especially as it may keep you here longer than we hoped for."

He seemed rather puzzled by my civility: he had not received much before. He looked at me keenly, could not make much by that, and then proceeded to look at his gaiters, tapping them carelessly with his stick.

"I like the place better every day, and the life suits

me more than I expected. I suppose all men are more or less creatures of circumstance and influenced by surrounding conditions. I thought the life of towns suited me while I was in them, but since I've been here I have come to see what a delusive mistake an artificial existence is. What can compare with a good brisk walk over the breezy downs, the simple fare of a country inn, the delight of lying down heavily fatigued, to wake at sunrise refreshed and vigorous?"

"To be sure, sir," said I. "Nothing in towns can compare with these pleasures, if one is properly constituted for their enjoyment. And certainly from a physical point of view you seem peculiarly fitted by nature for the life of a country gentleman."

"I am, Mr. Keene—I feel that I am. I only regret that I did not find out my mistake earlier. I have done many foolish things in the past four years, many things perhaps that are more than foolish. I should wish to forget the past altogether, but that the remembrance may serve to strengthen me in following a wiser and better course, if not a noble one."

I will undertake to say that no young man, not naturally a humbug, ever made such a speech as this on the spur of the moment. I don't believe in sudden

conversions, and the precipitate turning over of new leaves, by vigorous young fellows under five-and-twenty. Plums that have the appearance of ripeness before their season are rotten at the kernel invariably. However I smiled and nodded my hearty approval of his fine sentiments.

"I suppose a man could live here for a couple of hundred a year?" he said, after a sigh over his misspent youth.

"In a quiet way, he could live on that sum undoubtedly," said I.

"That's all I want. I made a fortunate investment that brings me in about two hundred. Living with my mother, who thinks of buying that cottage——"

"I can get it for her on very reasonable terms," said I, with a show of eagerness.

"Of course, she would ask your assistance in the purchase."

I rubbed my hands cheerfully, as if the prospect of getting ten per cent. out of the purchase delighted me, and promised to make a good bargain for Mrs. Yeames.

"And so I hope to settle down to a peaceful life. I feel better already with the prospect of it."

I shook his hand in cordial felicitation, though it cost me an effort to swallow the humbug without making a wry face. But I saw suspicion in the corner of his blue eye.

"This will be good news indeed for your uncle, Mr. Lynn," said I.

"Do you think he takes any interest in me?" he asked, trying to look indifferent.

"I assure you he does. He was speaking about you only yesterday—saying how much you had changed for the better in the last fortnight. It is only natural he should feel very deeply in this matter and watch this change in your character with keen delight. He is in failing health, you know." I twiddled my thumbs, and looked at him significantly. "You are his kinsman—remotely." I paused. "He is particularly anxious about the future of his little daughter." I coughed. "And though he may have unbounded faith in my integrity he would naturally prefer to place her welfare in the keeping of a relative who could devote himself exclusively to her interest. Up to the present time I have had the management of your uncle's estate, but of course it would be optional on his successor to employ me as agent."

"I should not wish to take it out of your hands, Mr. Keene—that is," he said quickly, seeing the mistake into which he had been led by the excitement of the moment, "if the property ever should become mine."

"Thank you, Mr. Yeames. I'm sure I shall be most happy to serve you, as I have served your uncle, faithfully, and upon the lowest possible terms."

"I shan't question your terms. Faithful services should be liberally rewarded in my opinion."

I thanked him effusively, and sighed as if I had had a load taken off my mind.

"Well, sir," said I, "you cannot, of course, wish me to divulge professional confidence; but I may tell you this. Your uncle has instructed me to draw up his will, and this is it." I laid my hand on the will. "And I may add for your further satisfaction, that had your character been other than he has found it in the past fortnight the terms of this will"—I patted the sheet impressively and dropped my voice—"would have been very different from what they are."

He was completely taken in; and so overcome

with astonishment and delight to find, as he believed, that he was heir to £50,000, that for some minutes he could not command his thoughts, but simply answered "yes" or "no" to my remarks without really following what it was I talked about. He was thinking what he would do with that money when he got it. However, he recovered his self-possession before he left, and when we shook hands in parting, that cunning look was in his eyes. I know well enough what was in his thoughts.

"You old rascal!" he was saying to himself. "I can see now why you were so precious civil. You want me to let you go on fingering those £50,000 when they are mine." That was just what I wanted him to believe.

In the evening there came a couple of brace of partridges with his card attached. At the first moment I felt disposed to pitch them into the yard for the cat to eat; but as the result of second thoughts I ate them myself, and found them just as good as if I had given an honest poulterer half-a-crown a brace for them.

CHAPTER VI.

TWO PHASES OF A GOOD GIRL'S CHARACTER.

I DO not know whether I am particularly sharp in penetrating character—though I have a decent opinion of my ability in that respect—or whether other people are particularly obtuse; but this is a fact—Lynn Yeames succeeded in deceiving everybody but me.

He was of that class of charitable people who will give a guinea at any time to have their names in a subscription list, no matter what the object be—and five to head it. Lynn Yeames, Esq., of "The Hut," (as with affected humility he called his mother's cottage when she had bought it), was down for everything. He interested himself in local matters, siding always with the majority; he became a member of the County Club, bought a

horse and got admitted to the hunt; and with his good looks, manly bearing, admirable horsemanship, and skilful freehandedness made himself generally popular. One way and another I reckoned he was living up to nearer eight hundred than two hundred a year.

"A pretty rod you're laying in pickle for yourself, my boy," said I to myself, and chuckled to think how he would have to draw in his horns when he found that he was down in his uncle's will for a trifling legacy of one hundred pounds instead of the £50,000 he was calculating upon.

All this time he was paying assiduous attention to Miss Dalrymple. He saw, though he said nothing about it to me, that his uncle was thinking of Laure's future, and wished to provide for her perpetual association with Gertrude, and he knew the hold he had upon old Flexmore through this pretended attachment to her. Cunning rascal!

I let him go on, conscious that he would not go too far. It was not likely that, feeling now assured of that large inheritance, he would pledge himself to marry a penniless girl. With his uncle's fortune and the effect he was now producing, he would be

able to take the pick of the county when he wished to marry; and there were within twenty miles many girls more showy than quiet, unpretentious, little Miss Dalrymple, girls with money, and much more to the taste of such a man as he. But though he would not be rash enough to actually engage himself, it was pretty certain that he would insidiously lead my unsuspecting little friend to believe that he intended to marry her, and I feared that he might obtain such a hold upon her affection that when he threw up the game, as he inevitably would when he discovered that there was nothing to win by it, the effect upon her would be serious. She was not a flirt; she had never cut up her heart into morsels and scattered it about amongst a crowd of admirers; her heart was whole to be given to one man, and one only. She was serious and earnest in all things, and it seemed to me possible that she might never care to give to a second man the affection that had been despised by the first. For this reason I resolved if I got the opportunity to shake her faith in Mr. Lynn Yeames.

One day I met her alone in the road that cuts through the Hazledown Woods.

"Here is a beautiful morning, Miss Dalrymple," said I, holding her hand.

"Oh! it is beautiful!" she exclaimed, looking round her. "See how the rime still stands on the brake, and look how the drops glisten on the gossamer. And what lovely tints there are on the beeches, and the brambles down there."

"You are thinking that they owe their beauty to decay."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because your tone is sad."

"The woods are sad; but I love the country for all that," she hastened to add.

"Yet you would prefer at this moment to be in your London hospital. You feel that you are wasting your time here—that's the fact, isn't it?"

"I should be sorry to think that," she replied, with quiet gravity.

"But you are. Here you are saving the life of one child; there you might be saving a dozen."

"They will be saved without me."

"And little Laure would be lost—that is true."

"Let us talk about the country," she said, as we walked on.

"No; we will talk about people. Lawyers and ladies do not care for things; the business of their lives is with people. I've noticed an instance of this in picture galleries: the men, not lawyers, hang about the landscapes; the women flock round the figure pictures. I warrant you skip description of scenery in novels, and go on to where dialogue indicates human interest; if you don't it's because you are too conscientious."

She laughed lightly and then said—

"Well, whom shall we talk about?"

"There is a man worth talking about," said I, pointing down to the cross roads, where I spied Dr. Awdrey jogging along in his gig on his beggarly round.

"Oh, I don't think there is a better man than he in all the world!" she cried, with enthusiasm.

"If he were only a little more practical," said I.

"I can't see that he would be better for that, though he might have been more prosperous."

"How?"

"Do you know what he used to do at the hospital?"

"No."

"THERE IS A MAN WORTH TALKING ABOUT."

"Sit down by the cots and tell the little ones fairy tales."

"That's characteristic of him," said I laughing. "Well?"

"The matron did not like it. She thought he was neglecting his duty; at any rate, she said so. And one day I heard Dr. Templeton say to him, 'Awdrey, if you want to get on, you'll give the brats physic instead of stories.'"

"And that made no difference to his course of treatment, I suspect?"

"Not a bit. And oh, how the children loved him!"

"And hated the matron. I can guess the rest, he had to clear out of the hospital?"

She inclined her head, and presently said—

"I sometimes think he would have died a martyr had he lived a long while ago."

"I don't see what else there is in store for him now if he is left to his own devices. There he goes, to look after a lot of thankless vagabonds, who'll never pay him for saving their lives."

"It is a higher form of martyrdom, I suppose."

"I don't believe in martyrdom."

"What would you have him do?"

"Make the beggars pay. Give all he can spare to charities as an advertisement. You must be practical to be good. Keep pace with the times. Advertise yourself and make money."

"That would not make him better."

"It would increase his power of doing good, and enable him to live happily."

She looked thoughtfully before her for a minute, then she said—

"Do you think he could ever be happy—in the ordinary sense of the word?"

"Yes, if he married."

"Married!" she echoed, in surprise, as if such an idea had never before occurred to her. "I cannot think of that as a cure for unhappiness in his case."

"Why not?"

"He is so—so serious."

"And ought not a man to be serious when he marries? Is it not one of the gravest responsibilities a man can take on himself—or a woman either, for that?"

"I mean to say that he seems so absorbed in his studies."

"Because it is his only escape from misery."

She made no response.

"You must not forget that this serious man, despite being absorbed in study, could bewitch little children with fairy stories."

"I do not think he will ever marry," she said, shaking her head gravely, after a pause.

"Why not?" I asked; "he is a man—and a fine man, too."

She was silent.

"The only difficulty," I continued, "is in getting any one to have him."

She looked surprised.

"A man without superficial attractions and without money," said I, shrugging my shoulders, "what chance has he?"

"Do you think all girls are either silly or mercenary?" she asked.

"There's a third section: but they don't care for good men; they prefer rakes."

I have mentioned the girl's trick of blushing, and looking sidelong in the expectation of seeing this home-thrust bring the colour up to her temples, I was surprised to see that it produced rather a contrary effect.

She blanched, and echoed my word in a low tone of deprecation.

"I don't mean an absolutely bad man, but one who thinks he is reformed," said I, "and attributes, or leads it to be imagined that he owes, his reformation to the girl's influence."

I was morally certain that Lynn Yeames had not ascribed his change to the effects of a country life in his conversation with Gertrude, however he had chosen to represent it to me.

"It flatters the girl's vanity to think that she has redeemed the man," I added.

"Is it vanity and nothing else that makes one delight in doing good?"

"I can't say, my dear—not having had much experience in that way myself; but this I know, that every good girl must be doing good, ought to be doing good, or thinks she is doing good."

"We are not worth much if we do not, you think?" she asked.

"Yes, that is what I do think—not only of girls, but men as well (bar lawyers). I speak of good girls, and no good girl would be content to be a mere toy, an idle plaything, for a man's leisure

moments. And the wish to save some man from evil courses too often leads the girl herself into an evil course."

"An evil course?" she said, interrogatively.

"Yes: the evil course of putting faith in appearances, and lending a credulous ear to empty protestations. That course may lead to irremediable misfortune and life-long unhappiness."

This was plain enough in all conscience, yet she did not allow herself to show that she saw the personal allusion to her own case. She was a wonderfully self-possessed young woman, and moreover had too much principle to suffer the opinion of others to bias her own estimate of a trusted friend; indeed, I believe that her loyal heart became only the more staunch by the defence of those she loved against an accusation in which she herself found no reason to participate. Of this she gave convincing proof later on, as I shall show.

Soon after this a ball was given, in aid of some philanthropic cause, of course—I forgot what; people will dance or dine to alleviate any misery that might have been prevented at half the cost—and equally of course, Lynn Yeames was a steward and

figured prominently in the advertisements. Well, whether it was to please herself, or to please Lynn Yeames, or just to show she did not value my warning at two straws, I don't know; but this is certain, Miss Dalrymple went to that ball under the protection of Mrs. Yeames, who, ever since the discovery at the flower-show, had shown herself mighty civil to the young lady. I went also, not to dance, it is certain, but to keep in with my clients for I hold that a man to succeed must be seen everywhere, and not bury himself in his study like poor Dr. Awdrey, who, I dare say, was sitting by some ailing pauper, or grinding away with a pestle and mortar and a book before him, while the girl he loved was being hugged and twizzled round by his rival.

I look upon dancing as a protest of natural man against civilization, and if you just close your ears to the music and simply look at twenty or thirty couples of men and women hopping about like demented grasshoppers you must admit that the least said about the march of intellect in this nineteenth century the better. Nevertheless, it charmed me to watch Miss Dalrymple. Her eyes black as sloes

with excitement, her face glowing with healthy exercise, her pretty figure and supple body taking

"GRINDING AWAY WITH A PESTLE AND MORTAR AND A BOOK BEFORE HIM."

on the prettiest curves with her graceful movements, her little feet moving quicker than the eye could

follow them; she looked prettier than ever I had seen her yet. No, there was not one in the room to compare with her, either in looks or movement. I wondered how ever I could have thought her plain.

"If they were all like you, my dear," said I to myself, "it would be a real pleasure to come to these affairs."

She enjoyed it thoroughly, for she was young and healthy in mind and body, and could be wise without being morose, and merry without being what is called fast. The music, the motion, the light and brightness of the surroundings exhilarated her; and then she must have known that she danced well and was admired, and I believe such a belief as that would set the Lord Chancellor jigging in his wig and gown. I think it mattered little to her whom she danced with, so that he danced well, for she was free from any idea of flirtation, and just as innocent and pure and sweet and good as she looked.

I wished Awdrey, who loved her, had been there to see this side of her character, but on second thoughts I was glad he had other matters to think about; for the pleasure of seeing her happy, though it would have delighted his honest, unselfish heart, must have

been outweighed by the pain of thinking she could never be to him but a beautful vision to look upon.

That is what he would have felt, not knowing what I knew, and how all things would turn out for the best in the end—how Lynn would be discomfited, how his real disposition would be seen when he discovered the mistake I had led him into, how Miss Dalrymple would then see clearly the fate she had escaped, and how her heart would turn to the really good man when she was disenchanted of the merely showy one.

But this I could not have hinted to him, so on the whole I was glad to think there were paupers and pestles and mortars and books to keep him away. Miss Dalrymple was recognized as the belle of the ball—she could have filled her programme a dozen times, I know. She danced every dance—three with Lynn Yeames—the first, the supper dance, and the last.

I enjoyed seeing her dance with every one except with Lynn Yeames' and it stirred up all the bile in my nature when he took her hand and put his arm round her waist. He trod on one old gentleman's toe, and I wished it had been mine; for in

that mood I only wanted an excuse to knock his head off.

The fact is I was as jealous as though I had been in love with Miss Dalrymple myself—which, of course, I was not; an old fellow in his sixtieth year—sixty-second, in fact!

CHAPTER VII.

LYNN FALLS INTO A TRAP.

I DID not anticipate any serious consequences from that ball. It seemed to me that Miss Dalrymple was entirely occupied with the delight of dancing, and doubtless no thought of anything else could have entered her head without being suggested to her. But that was not the case with Lynn Yeames. One can imagine what passes in the mind of a fox as he looks on a brood of ducklings sporting in a pond. He is just lying *perdu* licking his chops and waiting for the plumpest and nicest to come off the water. Some one, a lady, I will not tell you who, has just looked over my shoulder and whispered—"Try to be just!" Very well, then; the most generous—supposition I can make with regard to Lynn Yeames is that he was carried away by the good looks of

Miss Dalrymple, and perceiving that she was the best woman of the throng, both in appearance and family connection, he magnanimously resolved to sink the consideration of her being poor and resolved to secure her at any price, no matter how rich he might be by the death of his uncle.

Somehow or other he proposed to her that night —between the dances, perhaps when he led her into the adjoining room for refreshment, though more probably the old woman, his mother, shammed sleep in the brougham to give her son the opportunity as they were taking Miss D. home. How I came to know of it was in this wise—

Two mornings after the ball Dr. Awdrey called on me looking as yellow as an old title deed.

"You must go up to Flexmore House at once," he said, without asking me how I was or any other preliminary civility.

"What for?" I asked, for his manner was so set and firm I could make nothing of it.

"Flexmore is in a critical condition—there's not a moment to spare."

"What's the matter with him?" I asked, as I took my hat from the peg.

"SOMEHOW OR OTHER HE PROPOSED TO HER THAT NIGHT"

"Heart disease. He had an attack yesterday morning; another may be fatal."

"Poor old fellow! Does he know his danger? Is he conscious?"

"Yes, perfectly. He knows his condition; that is why he wishes to see you at once."

"What does he want me for?" I asked, suddenly guessing at the truth from the doctor's manner.

"He wants to see you about that fool of a will you drew up for him."

I was about to defend "that fool of a will"; but he drew me away impatiently.

"Get into my trap," he said, "I tell you there is no time to waste."

"Aren't you coming with me?" I asked, as he put the reins in my hand.

"No; I have another case to attend. I can do nothing for Flexmore at present; Miss Dalrymple has my instructions and I can rely on her carrying them out."

I drove over to Flexmore House suspecting mischief. I found my old friend in bed, but perfectly calm and collected. Miss Dalrymple was in the room with little Laure, who clung to her hand as though

she felt that soon there would be but that to protect and befriend her. Flexmore took my hand with a smile—a silent greeting that was more touching than words.

"My dear," he said to Miss Dalrymple, "you must leave us for a few minutes, please; we have a little matter of business to discuss, my old friend and I."

She went from the room with the child, after warning me in a whisper that Mr. Flexmore was not to be excited, and that my visit should be short.

"Well, what is it, George?" I asked, going back to the bedside.

"Tony, you must alter that will or draw up another at once."

A grunt on my part told him that I understood, if I did not approve, what he said.

"You thought right to tell Dr. Awdrey of the provision I had made?" said he.

"Yes, and I very sincerely wish I hadn't. Awdrey's a fool," said I.

"No, he is not, Tony. He's a fine fellow in every way—a grand fellow."

"Well, what has he done lately to give you that opinion, hey?"

"He refuses to be Laure's guardian or trustee for her fortune."

"He can't get out of it if you let the will stand; we shall see——"

"But the will must not stand; he has shown me that. For the child's sake, for that dear girl, Gertrude's sake, it must be altered. They must not be separated. The money must be left in trust, and her guardian and trustee must be my nephew, Lynn Yeames."

"Nonsense! As soon as Lynn Yeames finds he has nothing, he'll cease to pester Miss Dalrymple; he'll never marry her if he gets the money; and then how is your little Laure to live with her? A proof that he doesn't mean to marry her is that he has been hanging about her for months, but has carefully refrained from binding himself to any engagement."

"You are wrong, Keene. He proposed to her the night before last."

This took my breath away, and left me no ground to stand on.

"And she accepted him?" I gasped, after an interval of silence.

"She did. Yeames told Dr. Awdrey yesterday

morning. He came at once to me, and arrived at the very moment I was seized with the attack—otherwise I might not have survived it. He was with me all night; and this morning, finding me sufficiently recovered to listen to argument, he had this out with me. He has the highest opinion of Lynn—so has Miss Dalrymple, or she would certainly not have accepted him. I myself see no reason to disbelieve in him. In fact, it's only you, Tony, who stick out so obstinately against him, and you, as every one knows, are a man of strong prejudices—very strong prejudices."

"I a man of strong prejudices?" I gasped. "I, a lawyer, whose business it is to weigh both sides of a question and decide impartially? I, an old man of the world——"

"I don't care what you may be; I know you're an obstinate, pig-headed old fellow. God bless you, though!—but you must let me have my way—I know I am right. No argument will change me—I must have my way."

A gentle rap at the door reminded me that I must not excite my poor, weak-minded old friend, nor prolong my visit unduly.

"Good," said I. "I'll draw up another will. It shall be just as you wish."

"Thank you; thanks, Tony. You have merely to scratch out Awdrey's name, and substitute my nephew's. The will is in that box; the key——"

"Oh, I don't want that. I have the draft at my office. There must be no scratching out in a thing of this kind. A new will must be properly drawn up."

He gave me his hand, and held it with an expressive look; it seemed to say to me "We have been friends, you and I, many years, Anthony Keene, and soon it will be ended. You will be a friend to me to the last, and let no opinion of your own impede the fulfilment of this my last wish;" and I nodded, for I could not speak because of my emotion. Then I went away, determined to carry out his instructions to the letter, and return with the will for him to sign as quickly as I could.

As I left the house, I spied Lynn Yeames coming down the road; but I had no patience to speak to him, and jumping in the doctor's gig, I drove off as quickly as I could.

He saw me. My haste must have disquieted him. "What's that old lawyer doing there?" he doubtless

asked himself. I believe he partly suspected the truth : that Flexmore had sent for me to alter his will —anything but a pleasant prospect to him, who believed that the will already made was in his favour.

I kept the gig at the door; and then, going into my office, I fetched out the draft of the old will and a sheet of foolscap to write the new one upon. Just at that moment my housekeeper came in to say that my lunch was served. I had an hour's work before me; it would take me another hour and a half to carry it over to Flexmore, get his signature, and return. Whether I took the will over in an hour and a half or in two hours did not make much difference in my belief; but it mattered a good deal whether I went without lunch for two and a half hours; and reflecting that a man always works better and quicker if his physical wants are supplied, I resolved to knock off my meal before I went any farther.

Just as I was finishing, there was a ring at the bell, and my housekeeper brought in word that Mr. Lynn Yeames wished to see me. "Ah, ah!" thought I, "he wants to pump me again, does he? All right, so he shall." So I bade the housekeeper show him

into my office, and say I would be with him in a minute or two. I emptied my glass, and rose to join my visitor in the next room.

In that moment it struck me that I had left the draft of the old will on the office table beside the sheet of fresh foolscap.

I went on tiptoe to the door, and peeped through the green taffety blind. Lynn Yeames was standing by the table, looking round him curiously; I could see him distinctly, but he could not see me, by reason of the light from the office window falling on the blind. Quickly he caught up the draft, and ran his eye down it.

Now this being only a draft, had neither date nor signature, and he must have jumped at once to the conclusion that it was the copy of a will I was about to draw up; and seeing that by this draft all Flexmore's money was left to Awdrey, it must have convinced him that this instrument was intended to revoke that will which I had led him to believe was made in his favour.

The sheet fell from his hand; he stooped hastily, picked it up and replaced it on the table. I moved a chair, made a clatter with an empty plate as if I

were just rising from my lunch, then I opened the door and entered my office briskly. Lynn Yeames was seated at some distance from the table, and looking as pale as a muffin.

"How do you do, sir?" said I. "You don't look quite yourself this morning."

"I am upset: my uncle is in a critical condition —I don't know whether you know it."

"Yes," said I, shaking my head gravely. "I'm afraid it is all over with my old friend this time. We must prepare for the worst—we must prepare for the worst, Mr. Yeames," I repeated, significantly.

It told, that shot, though he pretended not to be hit.

"Yes, yes," said he uneasily; "I came over to tell you—I thought you ought to know, in case there was any legal matter to arrange."

"As it happens there is a very important matter to arrange. I have just come back from Flexmore House—you heard nothing there?"

"Nothing—my uncle could not see me. What is the matter?"

"Well—of course I can place confidence in you, Mr. Yeames?"

"I give you my word of honour that—you may

depend upon my secrecy," he hastened to assure me.

"Good, sir. I trust to your honour. Your uncle is about to revoke his will." And I glanced significantly at the papers on the table. "I assure you," I continued, "I have done all in my power to persuade him to the contrary."

"Of course you have, in your own interest," said he savagely.

"One must consider one's own interests sometimes; and after having had the management of the estate for so many years——"

"What on earth has induced him to revoke it?" he asked, taking very slight pains to conceal his chagrin.

I hummed and hahed for some time, and then I said, "I believe he has been considerably influenced by Dr. Awdrey."

"Good Heavens!" he exclaimed. "What has he been talking about?"

"Well," said I still with a good deal of sham hesitation, "I believe you were indiscreet enough to inform him that you had proposed to, and been accepted by, Miss Dalrymple."

He started as I told him this.

"To what use has the rascal put that knowledge?" he asked.

"We must not call Dr. Awdrey a rascal, sir," said I. "All of us have our own interests to look after. And really Dr. Awdrey's case is plausible enough."

"I don't understand you; what do you mean? he asked sharply.

"You see it's almost an open secret, at any rate the fact has for some time been known to Dr. Awdrey that my old friend Flexmore wished Miss Dalrymple to marry the doctor—one of those curious fads that invalids occasionally take up. I don't know if you have ever remarked——"

"Go on, go on, for heaven's sake!" he exclaimed, interrupting me impatiently.

"Well, sir, lately it has been obvious that Flexmore's daughter Laure has formed a very strong attachment for Miss Dalrymple—a most extraordinary attachment."

"Yes, I know all about that. Go on."

"Well, you see it is obvious that Miss Dalrymple cannot marry both you and Dr. Awdrey; while, at

the same time, it is equally evident that were you the child's guardian, and from any unforeseen accident you might alter your intention with regard to matrimony, Miss Dalrymple could only marry Dr. Awdrey by separating herself from the child Laure."

"But I could be trustee to the child's fortune, and leave her guardianship to Miss Dalrymple, couldn't I?"

"Oh, certainly, if there were time to persuade your uncle to such an arrangement, which," I added, with a profound sigh, "I fear there is not."

He turned his back upon me, and going to the window looked out into the thick gray mist, while I, with two or three little coughs, seated myself at the table, and began laboriously to draw up the new will, my spectacles low down on my nose, and one hand on the old draft, which I frequently consulted.

"How long will you be before you take that thing up to the house to be signed?" asked Lynn Yeames who, as I lifted my eyes, I found was regarding me attentively.

I looked at my watch, and then raising my eyebrows at the draft—

"Dr. Awdrey was good enough to lend me his gig

that no time should be lost; and if all goes well, I shall be at Flexmore's house at half-past two—near as possible."

He drew his hat a little lower over his brows, and quitted my office without a word. As the door slammed, I laid down my pen, put my hands on my knees, and had a good chuckle, for I felt I had played that game of cross purposes very well.

But how would it end? That I could not foresee. That he had gone off with some definite and immediate purpose I was convinced. Would he in the next hour undo himself completely by throwing off Miss Dalrymple and making his uncle understand that he had no intention of marrying her? It would be sharp work; but men lose no time when their fortunes are at stake. "We shall see," said I, returning to my work, for which I hoped there would be no need when I went up for Flexmore's signature.

CHAPTER VIII.

I FALL OUT OF A TRAP.

IT was two o'clock when I got into the doctor's gig with the new will. My house was just on the outskirts of the town; Flexmore's was two or three miles beyond, on the other side of Beagle Woods.

The mist had been thick all the morning; but it was thicker than ever when I started, so that I could not see three yards ahead with my glasses on. However, I knew I could trust to the intelligence of the doctor's nag, who took that road every day in the week, and nights as well sometimes; and with my collar well up, and my nose well down in a comforter, off I started.

I jogged along pretty comfortably until we got into the Beagle Woods; there the mist seemed to have settled down into a solid block, and the big

trees that skirt the road on either side increased the obscurity. However the nag kept on her ambling trot—I believe the beast was so accustomed to the road that she was dozing best part of the time—till presently, smash! Down she went without any kind of warning, up dashed the seat of the gig, and out I flew, as though I had been shot from a catapult.

I was on my legs in a moment, for my first thought was of the will I had stuck under the seat cushion, and I feared the nag would start up and bolt with it. I could hear her breathing heavily; she did not attempt to move. I ran back in that direction, when —bang! over I went again, flat on my nose. I had felt something strike against my shins, and as I rose to my feet once more, I discovered the cause of both falls—a cord was stretched across the road.

It slackened as I touched it, and the next moment was whisked out of my hands. Was this the wanton mischief of boys, or the sinister design of some one bent upon plunder?

"My name's Anthony Keene, and you shall suffer for this, you vagabonds, whoever you are!" I shouted, as I groped my way to the gig. I am well known

in Coneyford, and I knew that if they were boys they would scuttle off on hearing my name.

There was no sound of voice or footfall—only the old nag gasping on the ground; then I felt sure it was the work of a man. But I was not fearful of any further mischief, for the thief must be foolhardy indeed to attack an old lawyer, who is more likely to get him into trouble than yield much in the way of booty.

Feeling about the poor old horse, I found that both the shafts were broken, so there was no thought of going on in the gig even if the horse's legs were not broken as well. The will was just where I had stuck it, under the strap of the cushion; I clapped it in my pocket, and, after a moment's reflection, started off to walk the remainder of the journey, leaving horse and trap in the road to take their chance.

A nice walk I had—tumbling into a ditch on the right, and then a ditch on the left, running flat up against a brick wall, and then pitching on to a pile of flints by the roadside, all the time in such darkness and impenetrable fog, that for all I knew I might have been walking half the time in a circle.

To make matters worse, I found my nose was bleeding from the fall I got over the cord. It seemed to me I should never get to my journey's end.

However, after a time it grew less obscure, which made me think I must have got clear of the Beagle Woods, which was a comfort; and shortly afterwards I heard footsteps approaching.

"Who's there?" I called, when I felt it was time to speak, lest I ran into something fresh.

"Sam Martin. Be that you, Muster Keene?" replied a well-known voice.

"Yes, it is. How far am I from Mr. Flexmore's house?"

"About half a mile—keep straight on by the paling. Thought it were you, Mr. Keene, by your little squeaking voice. Shall I turn back wi' ye?"

"No. Go straight on. I've left the doctor's trap in the road—horse down—see what you can do with it, Sam Martin, and take care no one else comes into mischief over it."

I got to the palings by the park, and kept them in touch until at length I reached the carriage drive gate of Flexmore House. By this time, what with

one accident and another, it must have been pretty nearly four o'clock.

There were lights in the house. Before the door stood Lynn Yeames's mare, Flexmore's gardener holding his head.

"Afternoon, sir," said he in an undertone that spoke of calamity. There was foreboding silence also on the part of the maidservant as she opened the sitting-room door.

Miss Dalrymple was on her knees before a big chair drawn near the fire, in which little Laure sat her face buried in her hands. They were not aware of my presence, so softly had the maid opened and closed the door.

Miss Dalrymple drew the child's head upon her bosom and bent her lips down to the little brow, and then began to murmur words of sympathy and love in her low, sweet, tender voice. I knew what had happened, and would not disturb that gentle communion. I stood there looking at that touching picture through tears that dimmed my eyes. It may have been only the effect of the fog, those tears; it may have been the reflection that I should never more hear my old friend's voice, or it may have been

this testimony of a woman's compassion. Dealing with men and women, for the most part hard and selfish, makes one cynical, and blunts the edge of fine feeling; yet there is still, thank God, a corner of my heart soft and susceptible to the touch of pity.

Presently the child threw her arms about Miss Dalrymple's neck, and cried—

"But *we* shall never be parted. *You* will stay with me always?"

"Yes, dear little one—I will stay with you always. Nobody shall part you and me," replied Miss Dalrymple.

Then a long sigh fluttered up from the child's heart, and still clinging to her neck she pressed her cheek to this dear friend's face, and gazed into the fire.

And so I left them—opening and closing the door behind me in silence.

"Where is Mr. Yeames?" I asked of the maid who waited in the hall.

"Up stairs in master's room, sir," she replied lugubriously.

Yeames was standing by his uncle's bedside; he

thrust his hands quickly in his pockets as the door opened and I entered. No one else was there.

I went in silence to the bed and looked down, Flexmore's eyes were closed, but his jaw had dropped. The gaping mouth shocked me; and I turned away after a single glance. It was not thus I had hoped to look upon that face.

"You're a bit too late with that will," said Yeames, in a tone and with an expression on his face that implied a good deal—a tone of subdued jocularity, a cunning leer that bade me understand he knew why I hadn't come earlier. "Why, what have you been doing?" he asked with surprise. "You're a sight to be seen."

"How long has he been gone?" I asked, indifferent as to my appearance.

"Oh, not above a quarter of an hour. Gertrude's just gone down. She did all that was possible to restore vitality. But it's all over this time. He won't come back any more, as the song says."

"Have you sent any one for Dr. Awdrey? He ought to be here."

"Of course he ought, but I suppose he's got some interesting pauper to look after. I went for him,

myself. The old boy was shocking bad when I arrived here after leaving you. I went over to Awdrey at once, but he was out; came back, and by that time nuncky was pretty near the finish."

"Was he in a state of unconsciousness at that time or not?"

"Well, he was conscious enough to ask for you, and wonder why you hadn't turned up."

It occurred to me that Lynn Yeames, seeing his uncle's precarious condition, had himself stretched that cord for me instead of going for Dr. Awdrey, in order to prevent my arriving in time to get Flexmore's signature to the will.

"Do you know why I 'did not turn up,' as you call it?" I asked sharply.

"Not I; but you're not sorry, I suppose, that you did not get here in time?"

It was on the tip of my tongue to retort "Not so sorry as you may have reason to be, Mr. Yeames;" but I said nothing, for I wished to see how far this young man's fatuity would carry him, and contented myself with thinking of the bitter punishment in store for him when he should find out how completely he had deceived himself. Certainly no self-deception

could be more complete than his. Assured of my venality, led away by his own hopes and over-confidence in the successful issue of his cunning, he apparently felt as sure of being possessed of his uncle's fortune as though the thousands were already in his hands.

CHAPTER IX.

A PELLET OF PAPER.

THERE are some men who have so little self-respect that they do not keep up a decent pretence of virtue when the object is achieved for which it was first assumed, and Lynn Yeames was one of these.

He already took upon himself the airs of master in that house, and with a grand patronage bade me come down and take a glass of sherry. I complied, for after the shaking I had received I was in no mood to refuse.

We went into the sitting-room. Laure was lying on the couch holding the hand of Miss Dalrymple, who sat on a stool by her side.

"Oh, haven't you got all that over yet?" Lynn asked petulantly, glancing at them. "Sit down, Keene." He touched the bell. "It's absurd nonsense

to encourage morbid feeling and mawkish sentiment about a thing that's been foreseen for weeks—an inevitable thing a——sherry and biscuits for Mr. Keene." The latter addressed to the servant who came to the door. "I say it's nonsense!"

"Lynn!" said Miss Dalrymple, in a tone of mingled surprise, regret, and remonstrance.

"I say it's nonsense," he repeated harshly, "and you ought to know it, Gertrude, with your experience: the child has been petted and pampered till she's unhealthy. It's exactly what my mother has maintained all along. However I shall alter all that—the girl will be packed off to a good, wholesome boarding-school as soon as the funeral is over."

Miss Dalrymple looked perfectly amazed by this extraordinary outburst; she could not understand the meaning of it. I could well enough.

Mr. Yeames had already thought better of his proposal to make penniless Miss Dalrymple a partaker in his fortune, and did not care how soon there should be a breach between them. It was this rather than any sudden fit of dislike to Laure—whom he detested always—which had led him to make this savage onslaught.

Laure clung closer than ever to her only friend, and looked in terror at Lynn. Miss Dalrymple held her hand firmly.

The servant brought in the sherry and I helped myself. Lynn waited till the servant was gone, and then, going to the window, said—

"I shall go over and fetch Awdrey. The certificate must be seen about at once. Go and get my hat from the library, Laure."

Miss Dalrymple rose.

"I said Laure," said Lynn, turning upon them majestically.

The child sprang up and sped from the room to fetch the bully's hat; Miss Dalrymple stood with heaving bosom and close-pressed lips, and not a particle of colour in her face. She could not speak before me.

Lynn met her calm gaze with bent brows, and turned again to the window, flicking his handkerchief from his side pocket in a manner which by itself was insolent and offensive.

But in doing this he flicked a little pellet of paper out. It fell against my toe, and I quickly covered it with my foot. The next moment he thrust his hand

sharply in the pocket from which he had flicked out this pellet, then shook his handkerchief and looked about the floor at his feet.

"What dreadful weather, Miss Dalrymple," said I, setting down my glass.

Lynn Yeames went hastily from the room, snatching his hat out of Laure's hand as he passed.

I picked up the pellet of paper and slipped it into my waistcoat pocket.

"Oh, is this true, dear—is it true?" cried little Laure under her breath, as she joined Miss Dalrymple. "Will he send me away from you? Will he part us?"

"No, my child," said I, going up to them. "Take this assurance from an old man who loves you for your father's sake, and Nurse Gertrude for her own —you shall not be parted."

I left them. As I passed through the hall I caught sight of Lynn Yeames on the landing above with a lighted candle, looking about for the pellet of paper I was carrying away in my pocket.

CHAPTER X.

A MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE.

I HAVE in my office what I call my "handy drawer"—a good large drawer that slides easily and fastens with a patent key, and divided into a score of compartments. In this I put away anything that I think may come in handy at some future time, and an alphabetical index on a side of paper tells me at a glance in which nest to find what I want. I recommend a drawer of this kind to any one

of a practical and methodical turn of mind: he will have recourse to it more frequently than he anticipates, and find it occasionally of inestimable value.

Well, into this drawer, Nest Y, I put that pellet of paper after making a careful examination of it, and indexed it thus:—

"Yeames.—Pellet of paper jerked out of his pocket day of Flexmore's death, Dec. 18, 188—."

I shall have more to tell about this later on—a good deal more.

In the evening of that day I saw Dr. Awdrey; he came to me with a face as long as a fiddle.

"That's an unfortunate accident that happened to you this afternoon," he said.

"It might have been worse," said I, feeling my nose. "I came plump down on it. Wonder I didn't break it."

"I'm not speaking of that," said he, putting down his hat and seating himself.

"Oh, you're thinking of your property." The poor old nag had put his shoulder out, and had to be killed, and both shafts of the gig were smashed. "Well, if your old horse had not been thrown down, you would have been thousands out of pocket."

"You know what I mean: it is an unfortunate accident that prevented your arriving in time for Flexmore to sign the new will as he wished."

"There we differ. I do not regard the accident as unfortunate from that point of view."

"Well, what is to be done about it? The old will is virtually revoked."

"But actually it stands as good as ever it was, and so it shall stand."

"Supposing I refuse to accept the guardianship of Flexmore's child."

"You can't refuse. Common sense will not let you; humanity will not let you; I will not let you. Have you seen Lynn Yeames since his uncle's death?"

"No; he had left Flexmore House five minutes before I arrived. I hear he called at my house, but I came by the other road. Since then I have been unable to find him anywhere."

"That's a pity. I should have liked you to see him as I saw him. He is so confident of being his uncle's heir that he has thrown off all restraint, every pretence of decency, and shows himself the hectoring bully, the heartless rascal I have always believed him to be."

"Impossible;" he exclaimed, looking incredulously at me, who alone of all men he doubted and looked upon as misguided by prejudice.

"I tell you it is a fact. He was brutal to little Laure, and he insulted Miss Dalrymple before my face. Why? Because now that he believes himself master of his uncle's fortune, he wishes to break off his engagement with her. He has no more intention of marrying her now than he had the first day he came to Coneyford."

"I can't understand you—a man so clear in judgment on most things——"

"Get that nonsense out of your head, doctor. I tell you I am no more prejudiced against him than I am in favour of you. He's a selfish, heartless scoundrel."

"You will never make me believe that of Lynn Yeames."

"He shall make you believe it of himself. Abstain from letting him know how Flexmore's money is to be disposed of, and watch him between now and the reading of the will. He already talks of sending the child away to a boarding-school, and, as I tell you, reproved Miss Dalrymple before me for being too sympathetic and kind to her."

"But why should he believe himself to be his uncle's heir?"

"Because he fell into a trap, and was led to believe so by me. And I'll tell you something else, doctor. He believed that this new will was to revoke an existing will in his favour; and I am convinced that he stretched the cord that threw the trap over and delayed me, that this will might not be signed; and nicely he has defeated his own ends by it. I'd forgive him for that if my nose had been broken."

"I think I can upset that theory, at least," said Awdrey. "What time was it when you were thrown from the gig?"

"About two o'clock, as nearly as I can reckon," said I.

"Good. He left Flexmore House to fetch me at one o'clock; he was at my house at half-past, and he waited there for me until ten minutes past two."

He had proved an *alibi* for Lynn, and I had to admit I must be in the wrong on this point.

"And so you are, I am sure, on other points respecting him," said the doctor.

"We shall see that. Keep *your* mind unprejudiced, and watch that young man during the next four or

five days," said I, as I opened the door to let him out.

Unfortunately, this chance of clearing his mind was denied to us.

The next morning, when I called at Flexmore House, I heard that he had not been seen since he left, shortly after my departure, to fetch Dr. Awdrey; and in the course of the day I learnt that he had gone to London. This did not surprise me. "He's gone to see a London solicitor about this affair," I thought; "and may he be bled pretty freely by my learned friends!"

Betimes on Thursday I called again at the house, for I had made up my mind to visit the inmates there every day, knowing how long and dreary the days must be for them in the darkened house, and that the child, at least, looked upon me as a protecting friend. Miss Dalrymple was bending over her work with a worn and anxious look upon her sweet face. Little Laure started up with a terrified expression in her eyes, as though she expected to see Lynn Yeames with a rope in his hand come to haul her off to a boarding school, as I opened the sitting-room door. Both of their poor faces lit up with pleasure when I said—

"It's only I—the old lawyer—come to bother you for some papers."

Laure ran up, threw her arms round my neck, and kissed me; and, still hugging me, she whispered—

"You don't forget what you promised?"

"No," I whispered back. "No one shall take you away from Nurse Gertrude."

"Not Aunt Yeames, nor Cousin Lynn—not anybody?"

"Not anybody, with a hundred Aunt Yeameses and fifty Cousin Lynns to back him."

"You *are* a nice old dear!" she said, giving me another kiss; and then she ran away laughing, to whisper to Miss Dalrymple all about our secret—at once a woman and a child.

I gossiped for best part of an hour, raking up all the news of the village, for there's nothing like trifling chat for people in trouble; and then, when Laure went out of the room, I said—

"Well, my dear, have you had many visitors since I saw you last?"

"A few acquaintances and Doctor Awdrey—that is all."

She would not have said "that is all" if she had loved Dr. Awdrey.

"Mrs. Yeames, I suppose, has given you the benefit of a call?" said I.

"No; she had the dressmaker there. She sent to say I might visit her if I liked, but Laure has a kind of —of antipathy, you know, and I could not leave her alone. Dear little Laure! She is haunted night and day with a dread of being taken away from me."

"A not unnatural dread, though a groundless one, I hope."

"Yes," she said, and took a few stitches in silence. "Of course Lynn did not mean what he said. We say things when we are worried and troubled that ought not to be taken seriously."

"That is Doctor Awdrey's opinion," said I sharply, suspecting his influence in this defence.

She flushed, and said quietly—

"It is my opinion also."

"But it may not be Mr. Lynn Yeames's opinion. What then?"

"Then I should try to make it his opinion," she replied, smiling archly.

I hold Thackeray's opinion with regard to good

women. Thackeray would have loved Nurse Gertrude. I saw that she was prepared to martyr herself, to sink her pride, to forget Lynn's brutality to her, in the belief that the cunning of a good woman is superior to the headstrong purpose of a man, and that, by her subtle charming, she could lead him her way. A woman, if she has experience and intelligence, learns early man's weakness and her own strength.

"Have you seen him or heard anything about him?" I asked.

"No; he has not come back from London. I am anxious about him. I fear he is ill. I am sure he must have been ill on Tuesday; he was not himself was he? His manner was so strange. He was never like that before."

It seemed to me that if he were ill, the first thing he would do, being a selfish brute, would be to write and tell his sweetheart of his suffering. The moment a man of this kind feels not up to bullying point, he whines for sympathy. I know 'em. I thought it much more probable that Lynn had gone to London to spend some of his fortune in advance, and escape from the lugubrious condition of things at home whilst his uncle lay dead at Flexmore House.

Of course I kept this belief to myself ; and promising to drop in again during the day, I left the house, and went directly to Mrs. Yeames's villa.

There was an overpowering smell of crape—to me a most abominable stench—right out in the passage ; and through an open door I caught sight of Mrs. Yeames and a dressmaker half buried in preparations for deep mourning.

I was shown into a sitting-room, as pretentiously genteel and chilling as Mrs. Yeames herself, and there I waited till it pleased the woman to come to me. She waved me to a chair, after seating herself, without giving me her hand, for which I was grateful, though hitherto she had allowed me to take the tips of her clammy fingers.

Her lofty air and patronizing smile showed that she participated in her precious son's belief with regard to the heritage.

"I have called to see your son, Mr. Lynn, madam," said I.

"He is not hyah," said she, with that peculiar pronunciation which your "superiah" person affects, and which to my ear is more ungrammatical and, being assumed, more vulgar and more offensive ten

thousand times than a cockney cookmaid's misapplication of the letter "h"—"he is not hyah. He is in London, where he has met with an accident requiring medical treatment which confines him to his room."

"Can you give me his address?" I asked. "I have business to transact with him."

"No, I cannot give you his address. I have received a wiah from him, in which he begs me to act for him in all matters of a business nature until his return."

"The funeral arrangements have to be considered," I observed.

"I should like a tomb; not an ordinary grave—a brick tomb."

"I do not know that I shall be justified in incurring that expence."

"That does not concern you, Mr. Keene. That is our personal affaiah. You will oblige me by leaving the arrangement of Mr. Flexmore's obsequies entirely in my hands. We wish to spare no expense in marking our respect to our deceased relative."

"Very good, ma'am," said I; "as you will." And on my way home I called in on the mason who has

the monopoly of this business in his hands at Coneyford, and gave him to understand that he had better make terms with Mrs. Yeames for cash down, as he might never get his money if he waited until she had heard Flexmore's will read. He understood how matters lay, and, I believe, got his money in advance by making a reduction of thirty per cent.; and thus Mrs. Yeames was let in for an outlay which she would never repay herself out of the slender legacy left her by my old friend.

About three days after this, a client who had just returned from a business journey to the south of France dropped in to have a chat with me, and amongst other things he said—

"By the by, Keene, I crossed over with young Yeames."

"When?" I asked.

"On the 15th—night service. He pretended not to see me, so I did not bother him. I know a man at such times as this doesn't care for condolence and that sort of thing."

"He was going on to Paris, I suppose?" I ventured to suggest.

"Oh, farther than that. I caught sight of him

at the station, where the line branches off to Monaco."

"You are sure of your fact?" I asked, though I had little doubt of it.

"I am as sure it was he as I am that you are before me now."

Now the 15th was the very day he had left Coneyford for London. Was London not gay enough for him, that he must go on to Monaco for amusement? One thing was certain: Mrs. Yeames, to have received a telegram from him, must have known his whereabouts, and could not give me his address in London simply because he was at the other end of Europe. Why had she told me that lie? Because she did not wish it to be known that her son had gone to Monaco, lest it might be inferred that he had gone there for pleasure? That was the conclusion I came to.

It never entered my head that he had got out of the country for prudential reasons, and that the cause of his precipitate flight was that little paper pellet which was lying quietly in my handy drawer. There are things which escape even the suspicion of a lawyer at times.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MORTIFICATION OF MRS. YEAMES.

MRS. YEAMES found time to quit her dressmakers, her crapes, bombazines, and the rest of it, in order to visit the two poor souls at Flexmore House and worry them.

First of all, she attacked Nurse Gertrude upon the subject of mourning.

"Is it possible that you have not yet begun your mourning?" she asked, looking around her with a sniff, as if scenting the air for the smell of crape.

"Miss Clip is making our dresses; they are to be home to-morrow," replied Miss Dalrymple.

"Very injudicious. *I* always have the dressmaker in the house. You know then that an inferiah article is not substituted for the material you have bought, and that none of it is kept back. Also you can

be certain that good work is put in and no machining. The cost is very much less, too. What with lining and trimmings, and one thing and anothah, I fear these dresses will be a very heavy expense."

"Not more than I can afford to pay, I hope," said Miss Dalrymple quietly.

"I hope you have chosen a fashionable cut for my niece's dresses. I should have liked them to be like Sir Willoughby Chough's little girls, or the Honourable Mrs. Blinker's nieces. You must have noticed how very elegant and high class they are."

"I do not think Laure imitated any one's style."

"Surely you have not suffered that child to choose her own style?"

"Yes; Laure has very good taste in dress, and the dresses are for her."

"She'll be a perfect sight!" said Mrs. Yeames emphatically, with a dab of her hand in the air. "How very unfortunate! If I had only thought of it a little earlier. Deah, deah! They'll all have to be altered of course when she goes to boarding-school."

"But I am not going to boarding-school," said little Laure desperately. "I am going to stay always—

ever, ever with Nurse Gertrude. Mr. Keene says so."

"Mr. Keene knows nothing about it. Your guardian will settle such matters, and not *Mr. Keene!* And little girls should speak when they are spoken to—not before. I'm afraid I shall have a great deal of trouble with you when you come to live with me."

"But I'm not going to live with you—never, never!" exclaimed the child, screwing herself in terror against Nurse Gertrude, and holding her arm for protection.

"We shall see about that," retorted Mrs. Yeames, pursing up her lips and contracting her nostrils viciously. Then, turning to Nurse Gertrude, she said, "Have you made any plans with regard to yourself, Miss Dalrymple? Have you settled where you will go when you leave hyah?"

"No: it is impossible to settle anything definitely at present."

"One thing there is which should certainly be done without delay. It ought to be intimated to the servants that their services will not be required after their month is up." These were the same servants who had given warning during the brief

term of Mrs. Yeames's authority in the house, and who had one and all been re-engaged on her departure. "The house will be given up of course. Perhaps you would like me to tell them they must go?"

"No; I am to consider my position here unaltered, and no change in the routine is to be made until the will has been read, Mr. Keene says."

"Mr. Keene seems to be unduly interfering—to be overstepping the bounds of his—ah!—function," said Mrs. Yeames tartly.

Whereupon little Laure, with the courage of desperation, declared I was a dear old man, and wouldn't let cook be sent away, or let any one be made unhappy.

"And you won't, will you, dear Mr. Keene?" said the child, imploringly, to me when she and Nurse Gertrude had narrated this conversation to me. "You'll be just like the clever cat in *Puss in Boots* who got the ogre to turn from a lion into a mouse and then gobbled it up, won't you?"

"Yes, my dear," said I; "before the week's out, I promise you I will make that bounceable party look very small indeed; and she shall be so completely

chawed up that you will never see anything more of her."

The day of the funeral came—and a sad day it is in my memory, for even a lawyer cannot bury an old friend without a pang of regret for the past that can never be renewed: a bitter yearning for the hand and the voice and the eyes that never again one shall clasp, and listen to, and look into!

But we must live for to-morrow, and not for yesterday; and thus reflecting, I left my sentiment in the cemetery, and taking a good pinch of snuff to clear my faculties, I went back to Flexmore House, to get through my business there in a lawyer-like fashion.

I expected that Lynn Yeames would be sufficiently well to come back for the reading of the will; but he was not. However Mrs. Yeames was there with a telegram of regret from him (she had torn off the heading, but I found out from my young friend at the post-office that it came from Monaco), and herself prepared to stand as his representative; and a fine monument of respectability she was in her crape.

To her disgust I had up all the servants into the

room, indeed I had invited every one whose name was in the will. Dr. Awdrey was there, looking as if he were going to have his head cut off, and Miss Dalrymple, and little Laure.

When I took my place at the head of the table, the child came and put her arm through mine; but this would never do, so I led her back and placed her between Nurse Gertrude and Awdrey, and she was content to sit there, holding a hand of each, as being the friends she could best trust to after me.

Then I opened the will, and in a dead silence I began to read it clearly and slowly. You might have heard a pin drop. After the usual preamble, came the legacies to the servants, whom Mrs. Yeames would have packed off with a month's wages, and then began the sniffing and sighing and smothered exclamations of astonishment and pleasure as they learned that there was a £100 and a good suit of clothes to come to each of them out of the fortune of their kind old master. And when these were disposed of, I came to the Yeames' bequest.

"To Mrs. Anna Maria Yeames, widow of my brother, Joseph Flexmore, I give and bequeath the sum of five pounds."

I looked at her over the top of my glasses as I read this. She folded her arms, closed her eyes, and assumed a look of injured dignity. I would have given as much as this bequest to have been able to look round and see how the servants (who hated her cordially) managed to conceal their feelings. However I contented myself with reading on—

"To my nephew, Lynn Yeames stepson of the aforesaid Joseph Flexmore"—here I turned over the page, and glancing at Anna Maria found her eyes open, and her expression indicative of assured triumph and expectancy—"I give and bequeath the sum of fifty pounds and my glass case of stuffed birds."

Lowering the will and looking over my glasses I said to Mrs. Yeames Flexmore—

"As your son is not here, I will apprise him by letter of this bequest."

"That is not all, I am sure. Read on, if you please," said the lady, with that peculiar dabbing of her hand in the air to which I have before referred.

I bowed, and proceeded to read out in full the clause in which Flexmore constituted John Howard

Awdrey, M.D., &c., sole guardian of his beloved daughter, Laure Constance Flexmore, and in recognition and consideration of his service in the capacity of guardian and trustee, bequeathed to him the annual interest on such capital as remained after the payment of the foregoing aforesaid legacies, life annuity to myself of one hundred pounds, and all outstanding debts until the said beloved Laure Constance Flexmore should attain the age of twenty-one, when the whole estate, would revert to her.

I paused here, and again looked over my glasses at Mrs. Yeames.

The woman had risen to her feet; she was white with passion. I saw she wished to speak, and waited. Her lips twitched convulsively; it was some moments before she could articulate.

"Do—do—do I understand," she faltered, "that he has left nothing to my son but fifty pounds?"

"And a glass case of stuffed birds; that is all," I said.

"All the property, in fact, goes to Dr. Awdrey?"

"The bulk of the property goes to Dr. Awdrey, in trust for Laure Constance Flexmore, who inherits when she is twenty-one years of age. Until that time Dr. Awdrey will receive from me annual payment of all interest accruing from the estate in payment of service rendered as guardian of the child. There is a further clause providing for the appointment of a new guardian in the event of Dr. Awdrey's death, and the reversion of the whole estate to Dr. Awdrey in case of the child dying before coming of age, and which I will now proceed to read."

"Don't trouble yourself—I don't wish to hear it!" screamed rather than said Mrs. Yeames.

"Madam," said I, "I am here to read this will not solely for your pleasure."

"Let me look at the signature of that will," she cried, crossing quickly.

"There is the signature, duly witnessed," I said, showing it; "and the date you see is the 4th September of last year."

"Do you mean to tell me that this is the will he made last year?" she exclaimed.

"I do, madam. Have you any reason to doubt it?"

"I have," she said, and then stopped short. For how could she explain the means by which her

"THAT WILL SHALL BE CONTESTED."

son had possessed himself with the knowledge of the affair? She would have liked to proclaim me

a scoundrel and a forger, as I believe she felt convinced that I was, but she had just strength enough to contain her passion.

"That will shall be contested," she said. "I will telegraph at once to my son. We shall put this into the hands of a trustworthy solicitor."

"That is the very best thing you can possibly do," said I.

She clenched her teeth, and shook her head at me with such fury in her face as I hope never again to see disfiguring the face of a fellow-creature; and then she turned her back on us and marched out of the room with as much dignity as she could command.

CHAPTER XII.

THE DINGLE COTTAGE.

DR. AWDREY walked home with me from Flexmore House.

"Well," said I, when we had got a hundred yards on our way, "what do you think of Mrs. Yeames now?"

"I cannot say I ever liked that woman, but I never thought she had such a violent temper. One might make excuses for her—for any one indeed who puts such an extravagant value upon money," said he, in a tone of commiseration which seemed to me utterly misplaced.

"At any rate" said I, "you'll agree that it's a mercy I was too late with that precious will, which would have handed over little Laure to the tender mercies of such a woman. Why, the poor child would have been brought up in the same money-

worship—if she hadn't been killed by ill-treatment, which is the more likely."

"Yes: it could not be good for any child to be under the influence of such a woman. But Lynn, not she, was to have been Laure's guardian."

"Oh, they are a pair—like mother, like son," said I impatiently.

"That is not true. Lynn would have done what is right by the child."

"That's not true, either," said I. "You admit it would be ill for any child to be under that woman's influence. Well, how about Lynn, whom she has brought up?"

"His strength of character has happily saved him. He himself has frequently complained to me of the tendency of modern society to a vulgar adoration of money."

"Hypocrite!" I exclaimed petulantly; "that's what he is, and you're a fool to be cheated by him. I tell you he would have handed the child over to his mother, and occupied himself solely with making ducks and drakes of the money. You'll see what sort of fellow he is before long. He'll show the same cloven hoof that his mother has been kicking up for

our observation to-day when he finds all his little air-castles blown over. You'll see."

"We shall," said he; "and now let us talk upon something we *can* agree upon."

"Talk away," said I, vexed beyond measure by his obstinate credulity.

There was silence for a few minutes; then he said—

"Can you give me an idea about how much the estate will bring in?"

"Yes," said I; "I've reckoned it out. You may safely depend on an annual income of two thousand pounds for the next nine years. If you take my advice, you'll live up to about seven hundred—that will keep you comfortably—and put by the rest as capital to draw upon after Laure comes of age."

He made no reply to this, but after walking a few yards in silence, he said—

"I don't think Miss Dalrymple wishes to leave Laure. I should be very sorry if she did."

"Oh, that's all right," said I. "She won't leave the youngster—you may depend on that."

"I'm very fond of children—especially fond of that dear little one; but, of course, I couldn't bring her up

properly myself. It would be cruelty to the child to try."

"Of course you couldn't do it—alone," I said pointedly.

He shirked a direct reply to this hint, and once more there was a pause.

"That old house is not suitable for them," he said presently; "it's heavy and dull."

"Just what I have been thinking. Sell it, Awdrey; sell it. I'll soon find a buyer; and I know of the very place to suit you. What do you think of the Dingle?"

"That is a pretty little house: gay, and healthily situated. I like that fine wood at the back, and it has a good aspect. If that would suit them——"

"I'll take them to see it to-morrow. They could go in at once."

"I wish you would arrange that. At the same time you would greatly oblige me by making an agreement with Miss Dalrymple respecting a permanent engagement. You see, virtually, she will be Laure's guardian."

"Co-guardian with you; that's what old Flexmore intended when he made the will."

"I know; but the arrangement he had in view has been rendered impossible by later events."

"Pooh, pooh! Stuff and nonsense!" I exclaimed. "You'll marry that girl. Not at once, of course; but in about six months from now. That's a certain thing."

He laughed; but his laugh was anything but a gay one.

"Lynn won't have her now he has no money," I continued, "and she has nothing to give him but herself. And what's to prevent you stepping in and making her your wife?"

Again he laughed, but it was less pleasant than before; and with a sudden transition to grave anger he turned upon me.

"Whatever you may think of my friend Lynn," said he, "you must, at least, give Miss Dalrymple credit for loyalty and honour. You seem to think that every one is mercenary and heartless: that Lynn would abandon her because she is poor, and that she would accept me because I am rich. You do them both injustice. She is no poorer now than she would have been if Lynn had inherited this two thousand a year, and if he offered her marriage

when he expected to be rich, it would be only honest to offer to release her, finding he is poor. But will she release him for that reason? No! no! no! She will love him the more for being poor. And even were your insinuations verified—if he himself cast her off—do you think she would have so little self-respect that she could consent to bestow the hand rejected by another upon the first who asked her for it? No, I say—a thousand times no!"

"Well," said I, "if all the world had such fine sentiments and delicate susceptibilities as you possess, hang me if I see how marriages would be made."

With all my respect for Miss Dalrymple, I gave her credit for having a good deal more worldly wisdom than this Quixotish doctor. I felt pretty sure in my own mind that she had accepted Lynn as much from regard to Laure's interests as to a romantic passion. However I did not feel at all comfortable about the future; for, though I foresaw the course Lynn would inevitably take, I was anything but confident about Awdrey. You can place no dependence on a man of delicate feeling. He's likely at any moment to upset the very best schemes

a practical man ever devised. And this was my belief when I parted from the doctor.

The next day happened to be particularly bright and cheerful, so I engaged an open fly and drove to Flexmore House.

The moment Laure heard I had come to take them for a drive, she flew off to get her things; and, taking advantage of her absence, I asked Miss Dalrymple if she had seen anything more of Mrs. Yeames or heard from Lynn. She replied in the negative to both questions, the colour mounting to her cheeks through having to acknowlege Lynn's neglect.

"Well, my dear," said I, "no news is good news where such people are concerned; and I dare say we shall get on very well if we never hear any more of them."

She inclined her head slightly and with a certain dignity that seemed to say, "You are perfectly free to form what opinions you please," and left the room. I know she was vexed, but whether with me, with Lynn, with herself, or all three, I leave psychological readers to settle for themselves.

The Dingle lies about two miles from Coneyford.

It is a pleasant drive; we had plenty of rugs to keep our legs warm, and the air was just fresh enough to redden the tip of Laure's little nose and make her eyes sparkle. As for Nurse Gertrude, the pleasure of motion and breathing a brisk atmosphere quickly chased every sign of vexation from her pretty face, and the bright sunlight that fell upon it seemed reflected there in her smile. She had the courage and hope of right-thinking and right-doing people, and though I have frequently seen her brows crease and a quick flash in her eyes, those signs of anger or impatience ever faded quickly away.

I beckoned to Laure, and when she bent over to hear the secret communication which children so delight to make and receive, I whispered—"Was the ogre chawed up?"

She nodded, laughing; then she asked with the same secrecy—"But what is to be done with me? Am I going to live with Doctor Awdrey?"

"No; he won't have you. He's afraid you'll be dipping your fingers into his bottle of leeches."

She thought this sally good enough to repeat aloud to Miss Dalrymple.

"As you certainly would," I added, "if you had not Nurse Gertrude to keep you out of mischief."

There was no sign in her face that she had ever contemplated being asked to live under his roof, so the hope that led me to make the suggestion was nipped.

I bade the driver stop when we came to the bridge on the little stream that runs through the Dingle; and a pretty sight it was to see the water scampering down amongst the rocks in its course, with a tangle of dry reeds and brambles on either side, and here and there a tuft of sedge covered with ice glittering and sparkling in the sun as it bent before the current, the whole framed in with the overarching boughs of sturdy oak and lithe hazel.

There was a side door to the garden near the bridge, so I proposed that we should go in and see what it was like, as I had, by a curious accident, the keys in my pocket.

We went in, and followed for a little distance the course of the stream, where Miss Dalrymple,

"MISS DALRYMPLE POINTED OUT WHERE THERE SURELY WOULD BE PRIMROSES IN THE SPRING."

who had a healthy love of nature and delight in discovering her treasures, pointed out where there surely would be primroses in the spring, and perhaps snowdrops and daffodils; and thence we wound our way up and up through the pine-woods, in whose shade the white rime still lay on the brown needles, until at length we came to the cottage standing on the hillside, surrounded with a verandah, which in summer, Miss Dalrymple said, must be festooned with pretty creepers, for there were the stems all carefully cased up in straw. Standing there, we looked over a lawn, and the Dingle below, and a furze-covered stretch of down, where a quick eye even now detected some yellow bloom; and beyond that through the Coombe, a triangular patch of blue sea fading away at the horizon into the pink mist that blended it with the blue sky above.

"Oh, how lovely!" cried little Laure; but Miss Dalrymple could say nothing, but stood there pressing the child's hand, and gazing upon the scene with unspeakable delight.

"One of these keys ought to fit the front door; let us go in and see what the house is like," said I.

And in we went; and Laure threw open the shutters and let in the sunlight, bursting into exclamations of delight at every instant over the pretty parquet flooring, the light wall-paper, the gilding and colouring of the doors, the cosiness, and brightness, and cheerfulness of everything.

"It's pretty enough for grown-up dolls to live in," she declared.

"It's pretty enough for something better than dolls," said I. "How should you like to live in it?"

"All alone?" she asked, with a sudden qualm.

"No; with the cook in the kitchen, and Mary, and Jane, and Elizabeth, and the boy Bob, and Nurse Gertrude as well, if she could only be coaxed into staying with you."

The child caught hold of her dear friend's hand, and then looked at me doubtingly, as if she could scarcely believe such happiness possible.

"But it won't do," I continued, "unless there's a place for cocks, and hens, and ducks, and a pony and chaise. Now, take these keys, and see if you can find them anywhere."

Off she rushed, and then, being alone with Miss Dalrymple, I said—"Awdrey wants you to live here

with little Laure. I know there's a house for the gardener at the back, so you would not feel without protection. He wishes you to regard it as a permanent engagement, and has left it to me to arrange about terms, being, of course, too delicate to mention such a subject himself."

"I shall be only too happy to accept," she said at once.

"Good!" thought I. "She sees through Mr. Lynn, though the doctor may be blind, and has already decided that she shall not be his wife."

"I could not expect anything better," she added, in a sadder tone, yet firmly. "Doctor Awdrey is very, very good."

"Yes," I said; "Awdrey is the best man I know —if it wasn't for his abominable delicacy."

Miss Dalrymple smiled.

"With regard to terms now, what shall we do about that?"

"Anything you like," she replied, still smiling. "I have no 'abominable delicacy.'"

"Very well," said I. "We may as well continue the old terms, which seem to me quite liberal enough. All expenses will be paid—I should like you to keep

an account, and let me have it a week before each quarter day—and over and above I shall pay you the salary of one hundred pounds as hitherto."

She said that would meet her requirements amply, and I promised to draw up a memorandum of agreement, to be signed by Awdrey and her the next day. Just then Laure came rushing in breathless to say there was the dearest place for fowls and ducks, and the sweetest stable for two ponies, and the loveliest coach-house, with a darling little chaise in it already.

"Very well, then," said I. "Then the sooner you come and live here the better."

CHAPTER XIII.

AWDREY PERSEVERES.

I WAS drawing up the aforesaid agreement the next afternoon when Mr. Lynn Yeames was announced. I slipped the papers in a drawer, turned the key, and rose from my chair as the young man was shown in. He had the decency to assume a limp, albeit he had come over on horseback.

"I want to see Mr. Flexmore's will," he began, after brusquely nodding a salutation.

"The will itself is not in the office," said I; "but you can see the draft from which that will was drawn up." And I fetched from a tin box that precious draft.

He knew the sight of it at once, and, holding it in his hand, he looked steadily at me through his half-

"'I WANT TO SEE MR. FLEXMORE'S WILL.'"

closed eyes, with his lips firmly set, and his brows knitted as though he were saying to himself, "You confounded old vagabond!"

"Supposing I am prepared to swear that this is not Flexmore's last will."

"In that case I might be compelled to prove that it is."

"How would you do that?"

It was useless to complicate matters, so I said—

"In the first place, there are the witnesses to the signature, and then there is Doctor Awdrey, whose evidence I could bring—if any evidence were required."

"Doctor Awdrey!" he exclaimed. "Did he know that this will existed?"

"Certainly he did. It was in consequence of that knowledge that he induced the late Mr. Flexmore to decide upon making that second will, which I was prevented from getting duly signed."

"Show me that second will," he said, in a tone of authority.

"It is destroyed. If it were not, I do not think I should show it to you. If it were in your possession even, and you could prove that Flexmore intended to

sign it, there could be no possible change in the result. There is no revoking the first will."

He nodded, still looking at me steadfastly with his half-closed eyes, his brows knitted, and his lips set. I suppose he thought to intimidate me. He didn't succeed.

"Now tell me," said he presently, "why you led me to suppose that this first will was antagonistic to me, and the second favourable. Tell me that."

"Because," said I, "it is a professional rule to conceal one's clients' affairs from those who seek to discover them, and because I saw no harm to my client in allowing you to form any conclusion you pleased, and by whatever means you chose."

That made him wince.

"That is the rule," I continued, "as regards a lawyer and his client. But there professional delicacy ends. If a lawyer is acquainted with the secret of a person not his client, he may conceal it or publish it as circumstances direct."

That completely disconcerted him—unduly, as it seemed to me then, for I was only thinking of the mean and underhand manner in which he had sought to learn Flexmore's testamentary intentions. It

never entered my head—I wish it had—that his anxiety related to that paper pellet he had lost.

He looked at me, then at the table, as he flicked it with his riding-whip ; then at me again ; finally, as if uncertain as to the extent of my meaning, and to prove it, he said—"Supposing I gave you a thundering good horse-whipping, as you deserve, what would you do ?"

"Bring an action for damages like a shot," said I.

He drew a long breath, and there was a visible sign of relief in his expression.

"But," I added, "I fancy you have lost enough over this affair, what with the expense your mother has taken upon herself, and one thing with another, to forego an expensive luxury of that kind."

"You're wanted, if you please, sir," said my servant, coming to the door.

I glanced round to see that there was nothing Mr. Lynn could pry into or take away during my absence, and seeing all safe, I left him.

In my sitting-room I found Doctor Awdrey waiting to see me.

"I saw Lynn's horse outside, and I dropped in to know if he were here," said he.

"Yes; he is in my office. We have been having a little chat," said I.

"I should like to see him before he goes, if you don't mind my waiting here."

"Go in and see him at once," said I. "I have done with him."

He thanked me, and went into the office; while I slipped into my dining-room, which, as I have said, is divided from the office by a half-glazed door, that intercepts sound so slightly that what takes place in one room is audible in the other.

If any one thinks it is wrong to play at eavesdropping—and a good many sensitive people do think so—let them remember that I am only a lawyer. I have no compunction to listening in a case of this kind.

They had got through their first greeting when I reached the house, but, as I saw through the old green taffety curtains, they still held each other by the hand.

"A mere sprain; that's all. Painful enough at first; just enough to keep me from running about, you know," Lynn was saying, in his bluff, open tone.

"Why on earth didn't you write a word or two to us?" asked Awdrey.

"Oh, I didn't want to make a fuss about a trifle—especially at such a time—and you know what women are when there's anything the matter with a fellow?" Lynn replied, throwing himself in a chair.

"Your silence made us think that the accident was not a trifle," Awdrey said, half seating himself on the table and facing his friend.

"I see now that I was to blame. I'm sorry for it. That's all I can say, my dear fellow."

"I am sorry also. It must have troubled Miss Dalrymple: it would have offended an ordinary girl. Old Keene here doesn't like you—the most extraordinary prejudice I have ever known; I warrant he has put a bad construction on it, and done his utmost to set her against you. Indeed it taxed my ingenuity to find excuses for your neglect."

Lynn toyed with his riding-whip in silence for a few minutes (during which his quick brain had conceived a plausible means of escape), and then he said—

"Awdrey, old fellow, I must tell you all. I can't keep a secret—at any rate, from you. I purposely stayed away—I was purposely silent."

"Why? Let us have the whole matter out from beginning to end."

"Some months ago this old rascal here, Keene—for what purpose I cannot imagine—led me to believe that I was heir to Flexmore's fortune."

"He acknowledged as much to me."

"Oh, he did! I'm glad of it. Well, in the belief that I should before long be in a decent position to maintain a wife, I sought to win Gertrude—Miss Dalrymple. Then, on the day of Flexmore's death I discovered the truth—that I had nothing to expect from him."

The barefaced effrontery of this lie nearly took my breath away.

"I had been living rather extravagantly," continued Lynn—"beyond my means, in fact—relying on being able to recoup myself sooner or later, and then suddenly I realized that I was thrown upon my own resources, in debt, and incapable of providing the woman I loved with the home I had absolutely offered her a few days before. Of course I am to blame—I know that. I ought to have been prudent; I ought not to have counted upon Flexmore's generosity; I ought not to have offered my hand before I was assured beyond the possibility of doubt that I had enough to marry upon. But you know what I

am—a confounded headstrong, impulsive, thoughtless, reckless, thriftless, unhappy wretch!" His voice faltered, he covered his face with his hands, rose abruptly, stamping with impatience at his own weakness, and turned in silence to the window.

It was not a bad piece of acting; it took Awdrey in completely. He rose, went to the window, and, slipping his hand through the other's arm, said—

"There's nothing unpardonable in that, Lynn—nothing that she will not readily forgive."

"I know it, Awdrey, and that's the worst part about it. I must break off the engagement, but I know not how with such a generous girl as that. I know what she will say when I tell her I am a beggar; she will say, 'No matter, I can wait till you are rich.' Wait—good heavens! I am in debt now—a penniless beggar I must remain. I haven't the ability to gain fifty pounds a year, and never shall have. No; it must be broken off. I said that from the first. Do you know, I forced myself to affront her, that she might throw me over—I pretended a brutally cruel feeling towards dear little Laure, poor child!" (this with a tremor in his voice, the knave!) "that Gertrude might think me unfeeling. I went

off to London without a word of farewell, I refrained from writing one kind word—all with the same purpose. Don't you see now?"

"Yes; but all that must be made clear to her," said Awdrey slowly.

"Made clear to her? Is that the way to break off this unfortunate engagement?"

"No; but there is no necessity to break the engagement?"

"What do you mean? Surely you wouldn't have me ask her to wait till I grow rich! Rich! I, who never did a decent day's work in my life."

"No; you will not ask her that. She did not inquire whether you were rich or poor when she consented to be your wife; she will not refuse you now for any reason of that kind. You must explain your silence, and ask her to marry you at once. Listen to me, Lynn—I am not advising without reason. Flexmore wished you to be the guardian with Miss Dalrymple of little Laure, and to take the interest of the money in trust for her until she came of age. By an accident that wish was prevented from being legally carried out; but, virtually, you are as much entitled to the money as though the accident had not hap-

pened. Miss Dalrymple has consented to take care of the child permanently—relieving me of a certain part of my duty. Legally I shall remain her guardian, and shall in fact exercise my function whenever a question arises respecting her welfare, but virtually she is Miss Dalrymple's ward, and her services must be paid for. I shall settle upon her all that is paid me as interest arising from Flexmore's bequest."

"But, my dear fellow, you are robbing yourself—you are carrying generosity beyond all the bounds of reason!" exclaimed Lynn.

"No, I am doing nothing of the kind. I shall simply be carrying out Flexmore's intentions, and I shall remain as rich as I have been. Whether you marry Miss Dalrymple or not, I shall settle the money on her. But now you know that you have no excuse for breaking off the engagement."

Did you ever read of heroism to beat this? A man relinquishing fortune, and the fair chance of making the girl he loved his wife, from chivalrous consideration of that girl's happiness, and a conscientious feeling of duty!

Those sponsors made a pretty good forecast at his

character and disposition when they gave him the name of John Howard: for I doubt if the great philanthropist was ever more loving to the good, more generous to the erring, or kinder to the weak.

END OF VOL. I.

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